WITH THOMAS IN TENNESSEE

EDWARD ROBINS

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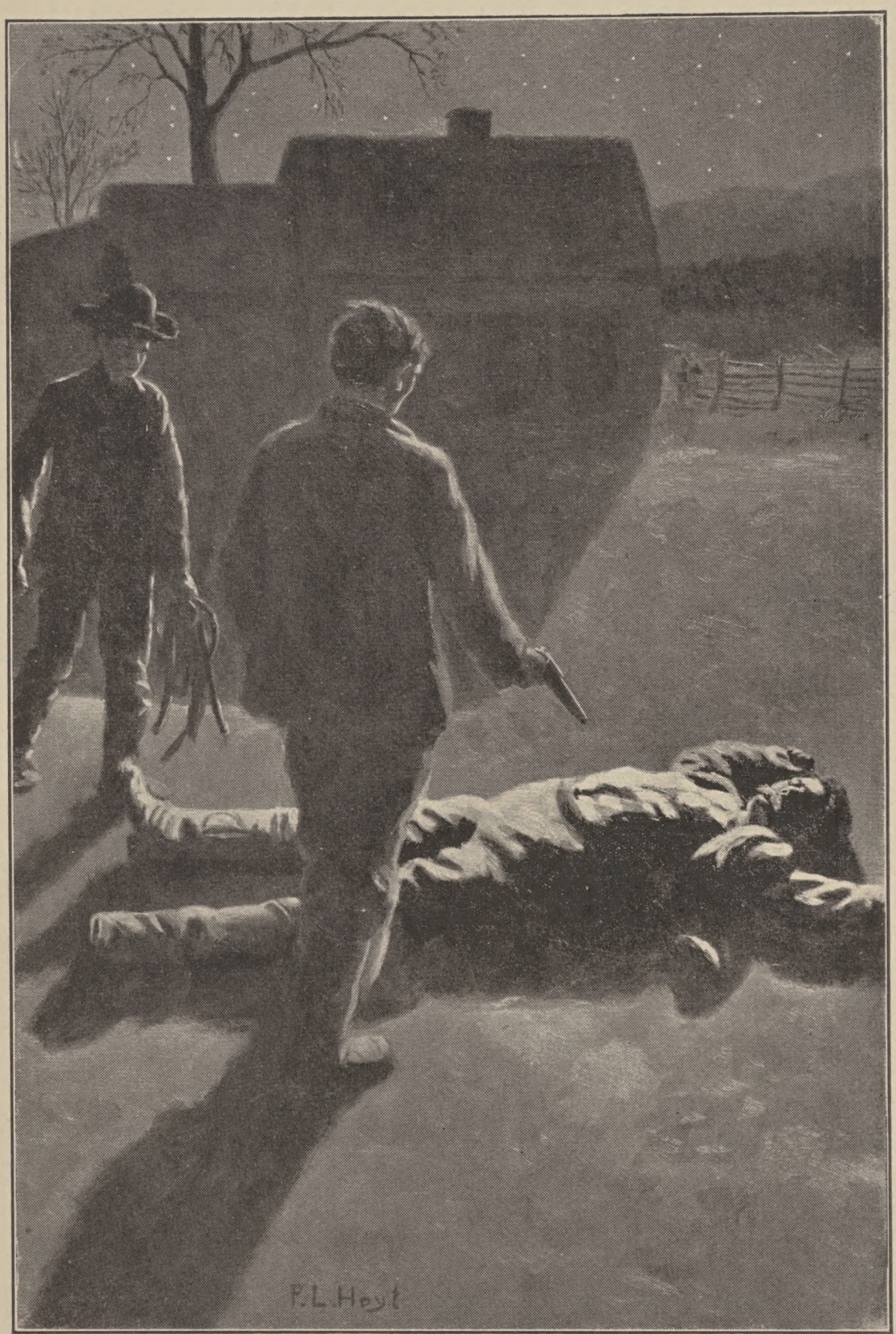

George Now Returned From the Barn With Leather Straps

With Thomas in Tennessee

By
EDWARD ROBINS
Author of "Chasing an Iron Horse," "With Washington in Braddock's Campaign," "A Boy in Early Virginia," etc.

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Preface

In "Chasing an Iron Horse," were described the adventures of young George Knight during the famous locomotive chase in Georgia. In this new story are depicted some of the experiences of Knight whilst he was serving as an aide upon the staff of General George H. Thomas, one of the greatest commanders in the conflict between North and South. Some of the incidents are founded on actual occurrences. It is unnecessary, however, to trace the dividing line between invention and history. The author's main intent has been to reintroduce George Knight to his old friends, and to provide a second picture of the times when the Union and the Confederate soldiers, now friends forever, fought against each other with a valor that is now the common heritage of all sections of a reunited country.

Edward Robins.

Philadelphia, June, 1903.

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With Thomas in Tennessee

CHAPTER I

GREAT RISKS

"LISTEN carefully to what I am going to say, and, if I speak in a low tone, remember that even Union walls may have Confederate ears!"

The speaker, a short, thick-set man with black hair and beard, a slightly florid complexion and brilliant black eyes, was none other than Major-General William S. Rosecrans, one of the most famous Union commanders of the great Civil War. He was sitting, dressed in a fatigue uniform, before a crackling wood-fire which gave the only illumination to a spacious but sparsely furnished room which formed the General's office. The blinds of the apartment were closely drawn, hiding the falling snow that made the night without anything but pleasant

to the unfortunate sentries who guarded the vast camp of Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Upon the right of Rosecrans, near the hearth, stood a still more interesting-looking figure, a tall, full-bearded officer whose stern yet not unkindly blue eyes and heavy overhanging brows gave a curious individuality to his strong face, at the same time that his erect, well-proportioned form suggested the ideal soldier. In front of him, their features dimly lighted by the fire, stood a man of perhaps thirty years of age, of medium height and graceful figure, with smoothly-shaven face that indicated courage and resolution, and a handsome lad of sixteen, tall, frank of eye, and self-reliant. All three were in uniform.

The full-bearded officer near Rosecrans was Major-General George H. Thomas, who was later to become known in history as the "Rock of Chickamauga," and already recognized as one of the most distinguished generals of the war. The man of thirty was a certain Captain Rufus Carton, of an Indiana infantry regiment, and the boy chanced to be an old friend, in the person of George Knight, whose previous adventures have

been described in the story entitled "Chasing an Iron Horse."

George was now an aide, by special recommendation of President Lincoln, on the staff of General Thomas; and we find him, on this evening of February, 1863, stationed with the Army of the Cumberland, then under command of Rosecrans. This army, after engaging so successfully in the battle of Stone's River, and defeating the intrepid Confederates under General Bragg, was now in winter quarters in and around Murfreesboro, where, according to the designs of Rosecrans and of Thomas, who was Rosecrans' right-hand officer and confidant, the troops were to be thoroughly reorganized, equipped, and prepared for a summer campaign against the enemy. The opposing armies, under Bragg and Rosecrans respectively, were lying in a semicircle, the Confederate right resting on the Cumberland River at Hartsville, above Nashville, and the left wing at "the Shoals," below.

"Listen," continued General Rosecrans, bending forward, and lowering his voice to a whisper. "Captain Carton, I have sent for you to under-

take a perilous enterprise. I know from the colonel of your regiment, that you are a brave man—and so I have chosen you, from among hundreds of others, to do the work I've mapped out for you. In short," went on the General, with a hesitating tone in his voice, "I want you to play the spy!" He looked anxiously at the Captain, as much as to say: "Have I frightened you?"

Carton never flinched. He regarded Rosecrans with calm, untroubled eyes, as he replied: "I'll play anything—spy or soldier—to help the Union!"

General Rosecrans gave a sigh of relief; General Thomas uttered a half-audible expression that sounded like "good boy!" and George Knight gazed enthusiastically from Carton to Rosecrans. "I've played the spy once myself," he thought, "and I'd give anything to try it again."

There was a brief pause. General Rosecrans rose to his feet, shook Carton solemnly by the hand, and sat down once again by the fire. "You're the kind of stuff we want in this war," he said, "and we want plenty of it, too, for our

Southern enemies—whom, one day, I hope to call friends—are full of grit and full of fight."

"This war is to be no child's play," observed General Thomas, with a sort of veiled twinkle in his blue eyes. "The man who said that one battle and ten thousand troops would end it was no prophet. Eh, George?"

"I hope it won't stop yet, sir," answered George, who was ingenuously boyish enough to wish that he might have plenty more of adventures.

"Don't worry on that score," said General Thomas. "The end is still a long way off. In the meantime, George, General Rosecrans has asked me to let him have a young fellow of your age to assist Captain Carton in this new enterprise, and I have mentioned you—although heaven knows"—here the lips of the speaker slightly trembled—"I am not anxious to run you into any danger. You have served on my staff as an assistant secretary, and proved a good one, too,—and if I consulted my own inclinations I'd keep you exactly where you are. But you are needed for an emergency, and so I must give you up—although only for a few days, I hope." Yet as he spoke his manner suggested that the

possibility of the boy's returning in a few days was by no means certain.

George's intelligent face beamed with the light of enthusiasm. He was very fond of General Thomas, but since he had joined his staff, three weeks before, he had not found any of the adventures which he longed for. Here was his chance. "Let me go!" he cried excitedly.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," whispered Rosecrans. "You may never come back."

General Thomas brushed his right hand across his eyes. Was he trying to hide a tear? "Explain to the boy and Captain Carton what is expected of them," he said, almost huskily, turning to Rosecrans.

"Here's the situation in a nutshell," whispered the latter. "It is advisable, for military and strategic reasons, that we receive accurate information as to the strength of the Confederate left wing, which is commanded by General Van Dorn, with his headquarters at Spring Hill, some forty miles from here to the westward. There is but one way to secure that information, and that is by sending a spy or spies into Van Dorn's camp."

George's eyes glistened. He had played the spy once before in his career, when a member of General Mitchell's army, and here was a chance to enact the *rôle* again. For the moment all thoughts of the danger of the thing vanished. Captain Carton's expression never changed. He merely gave the two Generals a military salute, as he said confidently: "I'm at your service always."

"And *you*, lad?" asked Rosecrans, looking very hard at George.

"Oh," answered the boy with enthusiasm, "I'm ready to start at once! It will be fine!"

Thomas regarded George approvingly, yet, as it seemed, almost sadly. "Humph," growled Rosecrans; "don't be too gay about it until you're safe out of the woods—or back again within the Union lines."

At this moment there came from outside the house the sharp report of a musket and then a cry of anguish. The men in the room started, and General Thomas walked quickly to one of the windows, raised the blind, and pushed up the sash. "What's the trouble?" he called out to a sentry. George, turning his face towards the

window, could see that the snow was still falling monotonously. The sentry made some reply, which neither the boy, nor Carton nor Rosecrans heard, after which General Thomas shut the window, replaced the blind, and returned to the fireplace. "A spy from the Confederates has been caught trying to crawl through the snow into our lines," he explained grimly; "and they shot him—that's all."

"A spy's lot is not always a happy one," observed Rosecrans, gazing steadfastly at the Captain and the boy as if he were determined to test their courage. But the two never flinched. So the sturdy General continued: "I want two spies in this case rather than one, because suspicion is not as likely to fall upon two as on one. Then, too, the plan which General Thomas and myself have invented requires two persons to execute it—and if one of the two happens to be a boy so much the better, for an enemy is not quick to suspect a boy of being a spy."

General Thomas stepped forward and put an arm on George Knight's shoulder. "George," he said, very feelingly and slowly, "I've been twice tempted to withdraw my permission for a

young chap like you to engage in this risky enterprise, but when I realized how much depended upon it, in the way of supplying us with information from the enemy, and how useful you might be, I felt that I had no right to draw you back. After all, we are all risking our lives, young and old, for our country."

"Don't be afraid for me," replied George cheerily, "I'll turn up again like a bad penny."

"And so will I," put in Captain Carton; "so you needn't waste any sentiment over us. Only tell us what we are to do—for I am getting as interested in the plot as if I were reading the first chapter of a detective story."

Rosecrans laughed, or rather chuckled, and then beckoned to the two future spies to take chairs and draw up near the fire. This they did, while Thomas maintained his standing attitude at one side of the hearth. The light from the fire cast on the conspirators a weird reflection which seemed peculiarly appropriate considering the secrecy of the proceedings.

"Carton," whispered Rosecrans, "I want you and Knight to do a little clever acting on this expedition. In short, I want you to masquerade

as farmer and farmer's boy—and show how well you can deal in chickens—and eggs—and pork!"

A smile hovered around the corners of Rufus Carton's firm mouth. "When I first grew up I tried farming over in Indiana, and made a failure of it," he remarked. "That ought to be of some help to me."

"And I lived for a year on a farm in my native state, Ohio, some time after my mother died," said George.

"Then I reckon you know a plucked chicken when you see it," drily interrupted Thomas.

"Well," pursued Rosecrans, "I shall give orders to my commissary department to-morrow morning to procure a team of horses and an old wagon, which they must fill with all the killed chickens, eggs, and bacon that can be picked up either in or out of camp, or begged, borrowed, or stolen. The following morning you are to be driving these things on the road to Spring Hill —you, Carton, looking for all the world like a Tennessee farmer, and George here impersonating a young farm-hand. And right here let me ask you this: do you think either of you could

imitate the lazy drawl of the real Tennessean farmer hereabouts?"

"I might make a bluff at it," answered Carton.

"A bluff won't do," said General Rosecrans with decision. "A poor imitation would be worse than none at all, and might bring you to grief, and the death of a spy, in short order."

"Wall, I reckon I might sort o' pass myself off as a Tennessee 'white-trash,'" said George Knight. His companions looked at him in admiring surprise. In drawl and intonation his voice so closely resembled one of the countrymen whom it was necessary to counterfeit, that it was hard to believe it was only an imitation.

Rosecrans tapped the boy lightly on the knee. "That will do," he said. "You're to the manner born. How did you get such a good Tennessee accent?"

"I haven't watched the old farmers coming into camp for nothing," explained George. "And then I always was able to imitate dialects," he added, remembering how a few months before, when he took part in the famous capture of a locomotive in Georgia, he had saved

a situation by changing his voice into that of a negro.

Thomas cast a searching, enquiring look at Captain Carton. "Captain," he said at last, "let us hear how you can speak like a Tennessean."

"I won't be a hypocrite," returned Carton. "I might possibly speak the 'Hoosier' dialect of my own state of Indiana, but when it comes to Tennessee, I'm done for—so long as General Rosecrans says, very truly, that a mere bluff would not do."

"I've got an idea," grunted Rosecrans. "George Knight can speak the dialect of this region perfectly, as he has just shown—and the Captain can't speak it at all. Well, let Knight do all the talking on this coming trip, and let the Captain be his dumb elder brother, who runs the farm and who has been speechless from birth. Eh, Thomas?"

"A very safe plan," rejoined General Thomas. "Don't let Carton open his mouth within the enemy's lines on any consideration. One false accent—one word with a Yankee 'twang'—might put his life and that of George in jeopardy."

"You're quite right," muttered Captain Carton; "I'm willing to play my part as the dumbest man in Tennessee, and allow George Knight to do all the talking." And thus the occupants of the room conversed in low tones, late into the night, as they huddled close to the fire and arranged every detail of the expedition which, it was hoped, would result in supplying Generals Rosecrans and Thomas with all needed imformation as to the exact strength of General Van Dorn's wing of Bragg's army. At length General Thomas, who had finally consented to sit down, looked at his watch. "It's nearly one o'clock," he said. "I think everything is settled —and if there are any final instructions, they can be given to-morrow night—eh, Rosecrans? They must leave about midnight, for it is a long drive over bad roads."

"Yes," answered Rosecrans, as he rose to his feet, walked to one of the windows, and, raising the blind, gazed out into the night. The snow had ceased, and a few stars peered out wanly upon the wintry landscape. "I think everything can be arranged. And good luck to the two brave fellows who are going to take

their lives in their hands to help their country!" He turned and shook first Carton and then George Knight warmly by the hand, and was followed in this ceremony by General Thomas. It was a solemn moment. Within the next hour all four of the participants of this conference had retired to their respective quarters, and were sleeping as peacefully as if there were no such things as war or spies, or differences of opinion between North and South.

* * * * * *

About three o'clock in the afternoon of the second day succeeding the interview just described, a rattling farmer's wagon, drawn by two sturdy horses, could be seen slowly making its way along a muddy, slushy road leading to Spring Hill, within less than five miles from that place. The vehicle was filled with provisions over which a piece of canvas had been placed, as if to conceal the good things from the too-eager eyes of some passing Southerner who might be tempted to appropriate a few of them without asking so much as "by your leave." In the seat at the front of the wagon were a man and boy who, although they presented to strangers the

appearance of the traditional "hayseeds," we, being in the secret, may venture to recognize as Captain Rufus Carton and Lieutenant George Knight.

Carton was dressed in a faded slouch hat, a rough blue flannel shirt, a shabby pair of corduroy trousers, held up by dirty "galluses" or suspenders, and formidable-looking high boots. The costume of George, who was driving, was of the same general character, excepting that he wore an ancient straw hat, and had, instead of corduroy trousers, those made of rough brown cloth. At the feet of the two travelers, behind the dashboard, reposed two old overcoats, which had been discarded by them because the weather had suddenly become quite warm and produced a decided thaw in the roads and snow-covered fields.

"Well," observed Carton, looking quizzically at George, "as Tennessee farmers I think we are successes."

"Wait," laughed the boy, giving the horses a gentle flick with his whip. "Our success will depend on whether we'll get out of Van Dorn's camp with our skins on or not."

"If they will leave us our skins," said Carton,

whose sense of humor was never spoiled by the imminence of danger, "I don't care what they do with our clothes. I know, for my part, that I feel precious dirty in mine."

"I would never believe it, to look at you," answered Knight, trying to speak gravely. "You seem as if the clothes exactly suited you."

"A doubtful compliment," objected the Captain, and then, seeing that George was having a little joke at his expense, he burst out laughing —a proceeding in which he was at once joined by the boy.

"Come, don't let us forget business," said Carton, after a pause, as they rumbled along the slushy road past a shanty at whose door stood a lazy negro woman contentedly smoking a corncob pipe. "You understand what you must do when you reach the picket lines of the Confederate camp?"

"Yes," replied George. "Explain that you are a farmer named Stone, who has fresh chickens and eggs, and bacon, to sell, and ask to be taken to General Van Dorn's headquarters at once. There I will ask permission for you to go through the camp selling your provisions—and

while I am handing out the things and taking in the money, you can be keeping your eyes open and seeing how the place is fortified, and so on."

"Exactly. You've learned your lesson perfectly."

"And for mercy's sake," urged George, "don't forget that you are dumb."

"Dumb from the cradle, my boy," laughed the Captain. "So dumb that—but look!" He clutched George by the arm.

Down the road, not half a mile in front of them, came galloping four horsemen in gray uniform. The adventure of the two spies was beginning in dead earnest.

"They probably won't stop us," muttered Carton, "but if they do, tell them we are farmers taking things into camp. We might as well begin now as later. And don't forget your Tennessee accent, if you value your life."

"All right," answered George calmly. His pulse beat quickly, and the blood surged into his handsome face, in pleasurable anticipation of the commencement of danger. For the first time since he had joined the staff of General Thomas he was to be put upon his mettle.

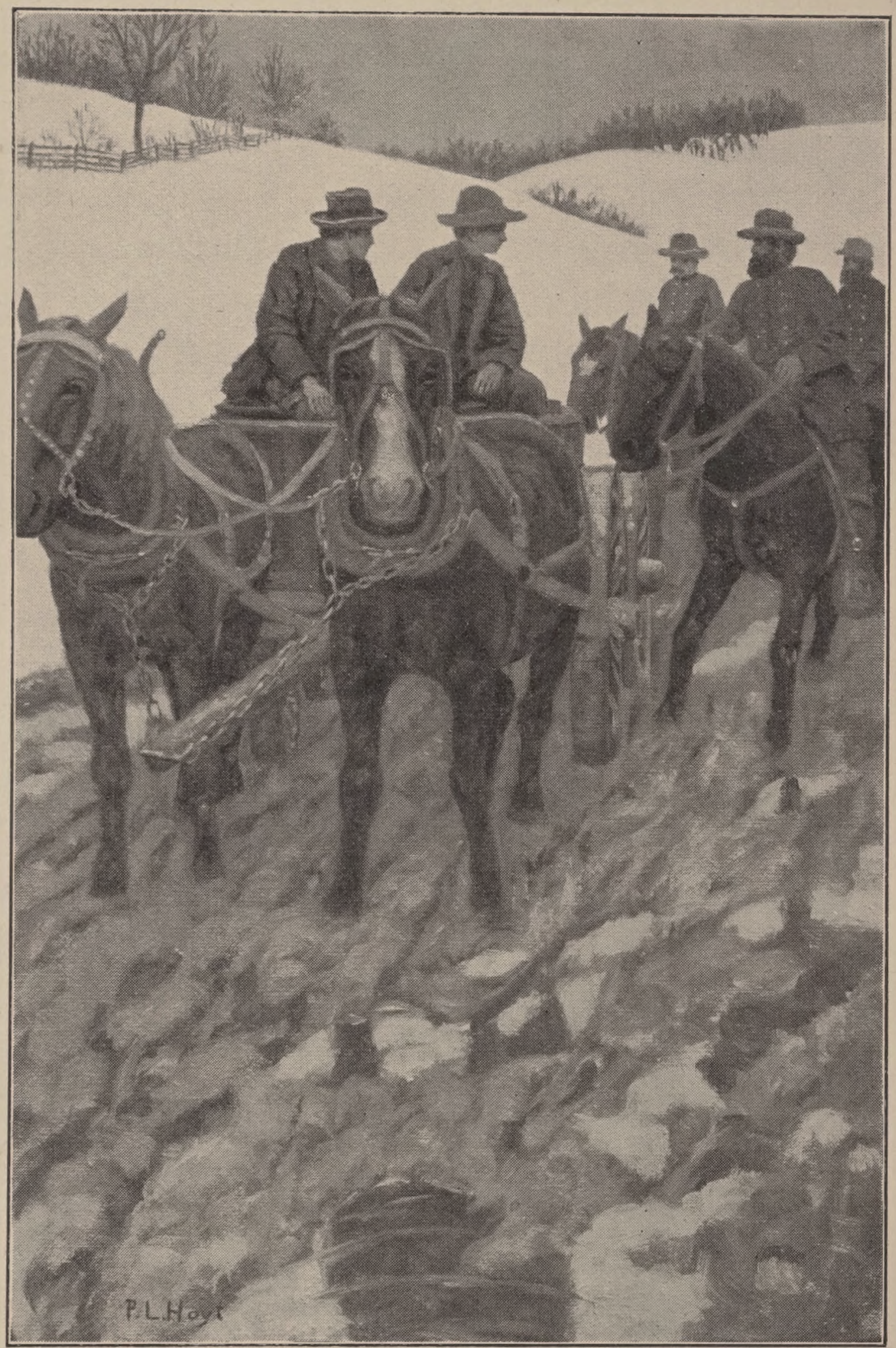
Nearer and nearer came the four Confederate cavalrymen until one of them, a tall, black-bearded fellow who rode a few feet in front of his companions, seemed to be bearing down directly upon the team of the supposed farmers. George pulled in his horses, so that they came to a standstill. The next moment the cavalryman was upon them and only averted a collision by the dexterous way in which he reined in and brought his own animal upon its haunches.

"Hi, you fools," he shouted, "why do you keep to the middle of the road? When you see cavalry coming, can't you pull to one side?"

By this time he had quieted his perspiring horse, and the other three Confederates had drawn up directly behind him.

"Your pardon, pardner," drawled George lazily, trying to put into his face as stupid an expression as he could. "Yer got on me so mighty quick I hadn't time." Carton, who spoke never a word, marveled at the boy's admirable imitation of a Tennessee countryman.

"I always did hear that a Tennessee hayseed was the stupidest fellow on the face of the earth," growled the soldier, turning to his fellows. "The



"What Have You Got Under There?"

next time you hear cavalry of the Confederate States of America approaching have the wit to turn out your slow-coach." It was plain from the man's accent that he had been born and bred in Virginia.

"Come, boys," he said. "Don't keep foolin' here." And putting spurs into his horse he passed to one side of the wagon, followed by the others. But just as Carton was congratulating himself that this incident had been ended the leader suddenly reined in his horse again.

"What have you got under there?" he asked sharply, as he looked at the canvas covering under which the provisions were concealed, and then fixed his glance on Carton. The latter pointed to his lips, in an aimless sort of way, and shook his head.

"My brother's dumb," said George, quickly coming to the rescue. "This here wagon's got chickens and stuff which we're a-taking to yer camp to sell."

"Chickens and stuff!" repeated the horseman, almost as if his mouth watered at the very thought of such provender. "And what's the '*stuff*'?"

"Eggs and flitches of bacon," explained George, lifting up the piece of canvas as he spoke, in hopes of propitiating the Confederate. There, on the floor of the wagon, were deposited baskets of eggs innumerable, plucked chickens, a quantity of bacon, and last, but by no means least, a basket of potatoes.

The other cavalrymen were, by this time, on the right side of the wagon, and they all stared, in a hungry, eager fashion, at the provisions.

"By Jove!" cried the leader. "Here's a find! We fellows have been half starving in camp, and now we run right into a nest of chicken and eggs and some potatoes. Here, boys—let's condemn these things right now, and I'll dismount and drive the wagon back to our regiment. How the men will cheer!" The horseman chuckled, as he could see, by anticipation, several hundred ill-fed men reveling in the contents of the wagon after the negro cook of the regiment had prepared them for the feast.

Here was a risky situation! It flashed through the minds of Carton and George Knight at the same time that if the provisions in the wagon were carried off by these cavalrymen there would

be no excuse to go into Van Dorn's camp, and, such being the case, the would-be spies must return ingloriously to the headquarters of the Union Army. "That will never do," thought George.

Already the Confederates were fondly fingering the contents of the cart. "Boys," shouted the leader, in great glee, "I feel twenty pounds fatter already. What a supper we will have to-night, eh?" His companions exchanged grunts of satisfaction.

Carton gave one agonized look at George which seemed to say: "I can't speak, but do say something to stop these men, or the whole game is up."

George read his thoughts, as was plainly evident by the reassuring glance he furtively bestowed upon the Captain. "Look here, pardner," he said, in a slow, halting voice, in which the farmer's dialect was well preserved; "this yere wagon load is contracted fer by General Van Dorn, an' ef ye touch one o' these chickens, or even so much as an egg, ye'll get yourselves in trouble with him—that's all I got to say to ye!"

"What's that?" demanded the leader. "Does the General know about these things?"

"Ye can jest bet he does," answered George. "Van Dorn has a' appetite, jest like you uns, and ef you stop this load going to him I won't answer for what'll happen to you."

The four men stopped fingering the provisions and the leader, shifting uncomfortably in his saddle, said, rather peevishly: "Does the General expect to eat all that's in this wagon?"

"No," answered George, "but he's got a staff."

"Yes, and a pretty lean one," grumbled the horseman. "Come, boys, let us be off, so long as these hayseeds are so precious stingy with Van Dorn's larder. We must feed at some farmhouse to-night—and to-morrow, when we are in the Federal camp at Murfreesboro, perhaps the Yankees will give us a good square meal."

The four men gazed at the contents of the wagon in such a hungry, woe-begone way that Carton could not resist taking pity on them. Turning in his seat he reached down his right hand and pulled out two fat capons which he silently presented to the leader with a bow which would have been quite worthy of a Beau

Brummel or a Lord Chesterfield. Fortunately for him, however, the Confederates did not stop to reason that his graceful manner was hardly appropriate to a backwoodsman; they were too intent in regarding, with glistening eyes, the two capons to pay any attention to the faultless bow of the giver.

"Good for you, dummy," cried the leader, in great delight. "You're not such a skinflint after all." Thereupon he coolly opened his gray coat, divested himself of a thin black necktie, proceeded to tie the fowls' legs together, and finally hung them around his neck, so that a capon dangled carelessly on each side of his chest. "There'll be a good supper for us four to-night," he continued. "Good-bye and good luck to you —and may the General give you fifty dollars apiece for every chicken you sell him."

In another minute the four cavalrymen had dashed off with a speed that threatened to shake the bodies of the deceased capons quite to pieces.

"Let me congratulate you, George," said Carton, with enthusiasm. "You handled that difficult situation nobly."

The boy flushed with pleasure. He had al-

ready begun to be very fond of Captain Carton, and this praise, therefore, delighted him. As for the Captain, he had already learned a great deal of George's history. He knew that he was an Ohio boy who had so distinguished himself in the scheme to capture a Confederate engine in Georgia that he had won the commendation of Lincoln, and so he was by no means surprised at the presence of mind that his companion had just exhibited.

"What did those fellows mean by saying they were going to the Union camp?" asked George, as he started his team in motion once again in the direction of Van Dorn's headquarters.

"Guess they were on a flag of truce, to see about an exchange of some prisoners," suggested the Captain, whose surmise, as it chanced, was perfectly correct.

They had jogged along for more than ten minutes when they overtook upon the road a weary pedestrian whose well-worn and bedraggled uniform proclaimed him to be a Confederate private. He was a man of middle-age with a gray moustache and "goatee," sharp, thin features and penetrating black eyes.

"Are you going to Spring Hill?" he demanded, as the wagon drew alongside of him.

"Thar's war we're be goin', pardner," rejoined George, with his best Tennessee intonation.

"Then give me a lift, won't you? I've walked it all the way from the Yankee camp at Murfreesboro—was taken prisoner at Stone's River last December, and made my escape three days ago—and I'm pretty tired, I can tell you—skulking along for a good many miles trying to avoid Federal cavalry and suchlike."

"Get in between us here," said George, cheerily. "There's room in the seat." As he spoke he and Captain Carton made a place between them for the fugitive. The man, with a muttered exclamation of thanks, sprang upon the wagon, and sat down in the seat designated. As he did so his rather fox-like features suddenly seemed illumined by a new interest, and his eyes searched those of George Knight's, as if he would read them through and through.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" asked the Confederate.

George gave an involuntary shiver. Had this private seen him in Rosecrans's camp, and would

he recognize in him a Unionist? The same thought occurred to Carton, who cast upon George a sidelong glance which plainly said: "Caution!"

"Not that I know of," answered the boy, with an assumption of carelessness. "My brother here's a farmer who's got a patch four miles from here, in this yere county, and we doan' get away from it very much. And he's dumb—from a baby."

"You don't say," observed the Confederate, regarding the Captain with an expression that was meant to be sympathetic. "That's too bad."

There was a pause. "I certainly would like to know where I saw you before," said the stranger at last, turning another critical look upon George Knight. "Your face does puzzle me."

George felt uneasy and angry at the same time. He would dearly have loved to throw the man from the wagon and drive on. But prudence compelled him to smile and appear perfectly comfortable, as any Tennessee country boy should have done, under the circumstances. One hasty exclamation, as he clearly perceived,

might have betrayed him to this inquisitive Southerner.

"Don't reckon I ever seen you afore," said the lad, with utter disregard of all rules of grammar.

George touched his horses with the whip, and the three occupants of the wagon drove on quietly for several minutes without a word being spoken between them. But all three were thinking very deeply.

"I certainly have seen that young fellow somewhere," the Confederate was saying to himself.

"Confusion on that 'Johnny,'" thought Carton. "Can he have any suspicions about us?"

"It would be too provoking for anything," George was thinking, "if he saw me in camp at Murfreesboro." And although the boy was brave —as brave as any one in the Army of the Cumberland—the idea that he might be recognized as a Union soldier, at the very minute that he was within firing distance of the Southern lines, was not reassuring. There is nothing either pleasant or romantic in being hung as a spy.

Suddenly the Confederate placed his right

hand on George's shoulder, and, turning full upon him his piercing eyes, cried: "At last I remember where I saw you. It was in Rosecrans's camp four days ago!"

"It's come at last!" thought the boy. But he never faltered, as he looked calmly at the Captain. "In Rosecrans's camp?" he repeated, trying to collect his wits.

"I'm sure of it," repeated the Southerner. "Your face is not one to be easily forgotten!"

CHAPTER II

WITH THE ENEMY

Captain Carton felt impelled to take the private by the throat and throw him out of the wagon. It seemed so hard to come so near the Confederate camp in safety and then have a "whippersnapper" like this foxy soldier destroy all his plans—and perhaps put George and himself on the gallows into the bargain. But he wisely restrained himself, and was content to look at the stranger with a dull, vacant stare, as if he (Carton) were the veriest ignoramus in all Tennessee.

In the meantime George had recovered his presence of mind. "Reckon ye did see me there four days ago," he drawled. "Ma brother here and me were a-sellin' o' some turkeys to General Rosecrans." And he added to himself: "I wonder how that will take?"

The private looked long and keenly at the face of the boy. George stood the scrutiny like a

true soldier; he never stirred a muscle. He was not accustomed to dissemble; he was, in reality, the soul of truth, but in an instance like this, where he was serving the cause of his country, he had no scruple in doing all that he could to throw an enemy off the scent. At last the Confederate turned away his eyes, and answered, in a half-satisfied tone: "I suppose that's how I saw you."

"Does he really believe George?" thought Carton. "I hope so, for the sake of our necks."

Not another word was said for some time. Finally the private, who explained that his name was William Lawrence, said, in a very friendly way, "I reckon you two are going into camp at Spring Hill to sell what's in your wagon?"

"Jes' so," answered George. "We kinder thought as we'd sell these yere chickens, and eggs, and bacon, to General Van Dorn."

A little later the wagon had reached the village of Spring Hill, a place which the Confederates had strongly fortified by the erection of two forts, manned by six guns each, with nearly forty additional guns defending the camp, and inhabited by 3,200 troops of which 2,000 were

cavalry. After due explanations from George the team was allowed within the lines by the sentries, and Lawrence, jumping down from his seat, disappeared with a word of muttered thanks. A young officer came walking out from a two-story frame house—the wagon was now drawn up in the main street of the village—and learned from several privates who surrounded the vehicle what was the cause of this unexpected visit.

"So you want to sell these things to General Van Dorn?" he asked, addressing himself to Carton.

"Brother's dumb," interposed George. "Yes; we kind o' thought as the Gen'ral might take half o' this stuff off our hands, an' we could peddle the rest through the camp."

"Stuff!" repeated the officer. He was a pleasant-looking, dapper little man, and there was a mirthful chuckle in his voice. "You call those chickens and eggs stuff? I call them food for angels. General Van Dorn's very busy just now, but I'll engage to buy for him half what you have in that wagon. We don't get things like these every day. 'Stuff,' indeed!" And he laughed as though he had heard the best joke in years.

The trade was soon effected. In return for half the contents of the wagon, which were removed by several orderlies at the direction of the young officer, George and Carton found themselves well provided with Confederate notes. These notes were not very valuable, owing to the depreciation which had been going on for some time in Southern money, but that fact made little difference to the spies. They had not come to Spring Hill for pecuniary profits.

Having accomplished this much of their expedition successfully the two adventurers were told that they might go through the camp, from tent to tent, and dispose of the remainder of their produce among the men. Nor did it take long to do it. The soldiers, most of them cavalrymen, and some of them without the vestige of a regular Confederate uniform (the place of which was taken by sadly worn-out civilian clothes) came running out from their tents when they heard George's welcome cry of "Chickens! Eggs!" They crowded around the wagon, with pathetic exclamations of delight, as of men half starved, and seemed to threaten to mob the supposed farmers, and to carry off their wares bodily.

"I'll be combusticated!" yelled one fellow, whose capacious clothes were three or four sizes too large for his lank body. "I haven't seen such a lay out since I came up from Georgia to this pesky war." He picked up, as he spoke, one of the chickens from the bottom of the wagon and fondled it as he might have done a baby.

"Yer kin have him fer twenty dollars Confederate money," said George, who was standing up in his seat watching Carton as the Indianian walked up and down the wagon arranging what was left of the provisions.

"Twenty dollars!" cried the Confederate, in a tone which was a curious combination of anger and hunger. "I ain't got fifty cents in any kind o' money!"

The boy, through his natural kindness of heart, came very near forgetting his part. In short, he was just on the point of presenting the chicken to the man, money or no money, when a warning glance from Carton told him that such a piece of generosity might bring suspicion upon him. Farmers were not in the habit, either in Tennessee or elsewhere, of giving the produce of

their farms away, unless forced to do so by the stern orders of some foraging party.

"Come, Johnny," said George, changing his tactics, "put that there chicken back in the wagon ef ye hain't got the money, an' let some other fellow as has take it."

"What?" exclaimed the man, with a mischievous smile playing about his mouth, "do you think I'm a going to give up a hen once I've got her safe?" He gave a cackle, in exact imitation of an old barnyard fowl, and stroked his prize with a mock fondness that caught the fancy of the crowd.

"Hurrah! Hurrah for Jake!" cried one of the soldiers. "Keep the old rooster, Jake—the more the merrier." Then the Confederates roared with laughter.

"Jake" bowed in mock solemnity, patted the chicken, and then, coolly stretching out his right hand, whilst he held on to the fowl with his left, he seized four or five eggs from a basket in the wagon and deposited them quickly in a pocket of his coat.

"Put those back!" shouted George, trying to look very angry. As for "dumb" Carton he

shook his fist at the hungry thief. The crowd—which now numbered nearly twenty-five or thirty soldiers—burst into another loud guffaw. One man, indeed, ran forward and snatched a large piece of bacon which he threw up in the air. As it descended five or six men made a rush for it, amid loud laughter, but it fell on the ground and was trampled under foot.

"What right has a fool to bring good things into camp, right under our noses," cried a burly cavalryman, "when we've no sand to pay for it? Let's help ourselves, boys!" Suiting the action to the word he deliberately helped himself to two fat chickens.

This boldness acted as quickly on the men as a lighted match acts on gunpowder. With a cheer and then a ringing yell they descended upon the wagon. Almost in the twinkling of an eye they had carried off its contents and were hurrying back into their several tents. George turned towards Carton, as the last soldier had disappeared, and laughed. "There's no trouble in getting rid of our goods," he said.

Carton walked from the end of the empty

wagon over to the seat. "Here comes an officer," he whispered, between closed teeth. "Pretend that we are very angry."

So saying he jumped to the ground, accompanied by George, just in time to receive a young Lieutenant who came running up to ask the cause of the recent noise.

"What's the trouble?" asked the Confederate, surveying in surprise the two strangers and the empty wagon.

"It's a mean trick!" answered the boy, as he tried to look very angry. "Me and my brother here—he's dumb from the cradle, sir—were allowed to go through camp to sell our chickens and things—sech as the General didn't buy—and a lot of the soldiers have scuttled off with 'em without givin' us a red cent."

Carton shook his head violently in the affirmative, in order to express the supposed violence of his own outraged feelings.

The Lieutenant began to laugh. "Well, if you fellows took the risk of driving through a camp of men who seldom get chicken," he said, speaking with the soft cadence of a Virginian, "you should take a troop of cavalry to defend your-

selves. We Southerners can't feed our army as well as the Yankees do."

"But, ain't we to get any money fer what's gone?" enquired George, still bent on keeping to his part. "Leastwise, can't we get our stuff back?"

As he stood there, with Carton, gazing in well-feigned anxiety at the officer, it was hard to realize that the two ill-dressed spies were not what they represented themselves to be—poor Tennessee farmers.

"There would be a riot in camp if we tried to take away any food that a man has obtained," explained the Lieutenant, not ill-naturedly. "We don't live on ducks and champagne at Spring Hill—and hungry stomachs know no morality."

"Ain't we to get anything in return?" asked George, in a nasal tone that was simply admirable.

The Lieutenant hesitated. At last he replied: "You might file a complaint with General Van Dorn. I tell you what to do—wait until tomorrow morning. The General is very busy just now—General Bragg is visiting here in conference with him—and it wouldn't do any good to

bother about it this evening. But I'll get you a tent for to-night, and some supper, such as it is —and to-morrow you can wait upon General Van Dorn and see what he will pay you—although don't pitch your hopes too high. We haven't as much money as the Yankees."

George cast an enquiring look at Captain Carton. The Captain made a sign to signify approval of the Confederate's proposal, for he foresaw that a night in camp might enable him to glean all the information desired by Rosecrans and Thomas as to the strength of the enemy.

"All right," answered the boy, reading the signal aright, and pretty well understanding the importance of staying in the camp a little longer; "ef you'll take us to the General to-morrow, we'll bide here to-night—eh, brother?"

"Brother" nodded pleasantly.

In a short time, as the sun was sinking in the West, the young Lieutenant had quartered the two spies in a tent in the very centre of the camp, amid the canvas habitations occupied by a regiment of cavalry. Calling a sergeant of the regiment to the door of the tent, he said: "Miles, here are two farmers who must stay

here until to-morrow morning; they have a claim for damages against the army. See that they get some supper to-night, will you?"

The sergeant happened to be a chubby, red-faced Irishman, whose Confederate coat and waistcoat were rather spoiled in effect by the addition of a pair of old black cloth pantaloons and a dilapidated slouch hat. But he possessed a cheery smile which shone out blandly through his red whiskers, and proved rather reassuring to the strangers.

"By Saint Patrick," he said, "we soldiers don't get food that comes from Delmonico's, in New York, but such as there is here ye're welcome to—or my name ain't Miles Limerick O'Reilly!"

"And how on earth do you keep so plump, Miles?" asked the Lieutenant, laughing. "You complain so of the food?"

"Whist, an' I'll tell your honor," explained Miles, drawing closer to the Lieutenant. "Ye see 'twas this way. Two weeks ago I fell sick, and reported meself to the orderly sergeant. So he whisks me off to the doctor. 'What's ailin' you, Miles?' says he. 'I've a very heavy light-

ness in the head, doctor, dear,' says I. 'Why, a *heavy* lightness is a paradox,' says he. 'And what kind o' disease is a paradox?' says I, feelin' kind o' frightened like. 'It's a pretty bad disease,' says he, laughing, 'but I reckon if ye go to the hospital for a week, ye can be cured.' So I goes to the hospital for a week, and they feeds me on food for the sick and here I be, cured of paradox, and plump as a partridge."

"Well, Miles, now that the 'Paradox' is over, see that these two farmers get something to eat to-night, and to-morrow I'll see what can be done for them about those chickens." And the Lieutenant went off humming "Dixie."

An hour later the Irishman had introduced George and Carton to a party of eight or nine cavalrymen who were making their supper around an inviting camp-fire. This supper consisted of a decoction called coffee (which, from the taste, suggested that three-fourths of it must be chickory), some bacon, a quantity of hominy, and three chickens which were roasted on a spit. The two spies had a very keen suspicion that the chickens, if not the bacon, came from their own wagon, but they had no

intention of quarreling on this score. The supper which the soldiers freely shared with them, tasted like a feast, and George was only too glad to have the chance of joining in the general conversation and asking such questions as he dared about the fortifications at Spring Hill, the strength of the camp, *et cetera.* Carton smoked a pipe, which had been lent to him by O'Reilly, and drank in all the information which was easily forthcoming from the men. For there was no suspicion as to the loyalty of the supposed farmers for the Southern cause, and George, by some adroit talk, had given the impression, very decidedly, that he and his "brother" were among the most staunch of Confederates. Thus it was that Carton heard details which, as he knew, would be of invaluable aid to Generals Rosecrans and Thomas, provided he could get safely back to the Union camp. There was the rub! Yet why should there be any trouble on that score? So far everything had gone successfully; even that fox-eyed soldier who escaped from the Union lines had had his suspicions lulled to sleep.

In the meantime George went on talking to

the cavalrymen, all of whom had quickly made friends with the boy, who, in spite of his slow Tennessee "twang," seemed to be remarkably alert and nimble of intellect.

"You youngster ought to join the army," said one of the soldiers, taking a lingering farewell sip of "coffee" from his tin cup, and looking at George through the firelight. "You must find it dull on a farm."

"Pooh!" spoke up another man. "Dull on a farm! It's as dull as ditch-water here. There's not been anything exciting in camp for a week—except that hanging yesterday."

"That hanging yesterday?" echoed George.

"Yes; a man was caught here trying to pass himself off to General Van Dorn as a newspaper correspondent, and he turned out to be a spy from Washington—sent down here, no doubt, by Abe Lincoln or Secretary of War Stanton. So they strapped him up—and may they do the same thing to all others."

George shivered, in spite of himself. It was very pleasant to play the spy, but when he heard about hangings, and realized, now that he was in the heart of the enemy, how the slightest false

move might send Carton and himself to the gibbet, he could not help feeling nervous. But he plucked up his courage, as he said, sturdily enough: "Hangin', or no hangin', I reckon I'll stay on the farm, and help brother. Ye see he can't talk, and he needs some one near him."

This sentiment seemed to meet with unanimous approval, to judge from the chorus of "Good" with which it was greeted.

"Where's your farm?" asked the last speaker.

George, who had been expecting such a question answered quickly: "Jest a mile outside o' B———," mentioning a small village not far from Spring Hill.

"Outside of B———!" repeated the cavalryman. "Then you must know old Pete Langston, who lives right near you—on the outskirts of the town?"

"I should say I did," the boy said. "Yes, indeedy." But he thought to himself, with sensations that proved anything but agreeable: "I haven't the slightest idea who Pete Langston is, and I only hope I won't be questioned about him."

"How's his daughter?" persisted the Confederate.

"I wish his daughter was in Kamchatka," thought George, but he answered: "She's pretty well."

"Pretty well, eh?" echoed the man, in apparent surprise. "Why they always said her heart disease never could be cured!"

George bit his lip, and it was well for his safety, and that of Carton, that his face was not in the full light of the camp-fire. But he recovered his composure in an instant.

"Why they had a great doctor over from Nashville, and he claims as he cured her," he explained.

"And where's Job Langston now?"

This leading question was never answered, fortunately enough perhaps, for suddenly Carton gave a moan, clutched at his throat, and then, falling off the soap box on which he had been sitting, began to writhe upon the ground. His face twitched and his limbs moved convulsively. There was a stir among the men, whilst George, greatly alarmed, rushed to his companion's rescue.

"Whiskey!" cried one of the soldiers; "the poor devil has a fit!"

And then he produced from a mysterious pocket of his uniform a black flask, part of whose contents he poured down the throat of the sufferer so quickly that the latter sputtered and choked in a manner painful to behold. But the medicine seemed, at last, to have a good effect, for his convulsions gradually ceased, his eyes, which had been rolling horribly, now regarded George quietly, and he tried to raise himself to a sitting posture. But the effort was too much for the farmer's strength; he sank back on the ground with an expression of extreme weakness.

"I had better get him to our tent," said George nervously. In his excitement he forgot to use his Tennessee accent, but the soldiers were so intent on watching Carton, that they never noticed the omission. Several of them helped to carry the Captain to the tent which had been assigned him, about a hundred yards away, and there deposited him on the heavy blanket which was to form his bed for the night. "He'll be all right in a while," said one of the good Samaritans reassuringly, after the others had left the tent.

"Thanks," answered George, who by this time had recovered his presence of mind and his Tennessean drawl. "I reckon he and I'll turn in for the night now, and he'll be better by sun-up."

"Does he want a surgeon?" asked the man kindly as he lighted a candle which he found on the tent table.

At this Carton shook his head so violently that George said, "No, thanks."

"Well, good-night," said the soldier. The next moment he had left the tent.

"How *do* you feel now, old fellow?" asked George anxiously, bending down and placing one hand on the invalid's brow.

Carton indulged in a suppressed paroxysm of laughter by way of answer. George drew himself up in surprise. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked in bewilderment.

"Come, Georgie, I see I deceived you as well as the rest of the fellows."

"Then you had no fit—no epilepsy?"

"No more than you had," chuckled Carton. "I merely saw that you were likely to get yourself tangled up with that provoking Johnny who was asking you questions about the Langston

family, and as I was under a well defined impression that your knowledge of the aforesaid Langstons might be vague, to say the least, I determined to divert the conversation by indulging in a little fit."

"Well!" exclaimed George in tones wherein surprise and admiration were equally mingled. "You fooled me completely."

"Did I do it well?" asked Carton, with a tinge of very pardonable pride. "I had a friend out in Indiana who used to have this sort of seizures—poor boy—and I know the symptoms only too surely."

"All I can say is that you're an artist in fits," replied the boy. "You frightened me half to death; every second I expected to see you breathe your last. But I'm mighty thankful you came to my rescue, for if that Southerner had asked me two or three more questions about those wretched Langstons I should certainly have come to grief. As it was, I insisted on curing a lady who was suffering from incurable heart disease. A few more breaks like that and all would have been over with us. And now I see why you didn't want the surgeon."

"Yes," whispered Carton, sitting up in his blanket bed and hugging his knees, "I was afraid that a doctor might find out that I had only been shamming, and that was why I shook my head, and ——"

"Hush!" interrupted George, in a low tone. "I hear some one coming."

The boy spoke just in time; the next instant found some one scratching at the flap of the tent.

Carton sank down on the bed and closed his eyes. "Come in," cried George. An elderly man, white of beard and kindly of aspect, wearing a black slouch hat and an undress Confederate uniform, entered the tent. In his right hand he carried a vial of pink medicine.

"Is this the man who had an epileptic seizure?" he enquired, looking at the apparently sleeping Carton.

"Yes, but he is all right now," answered George, quickly. "It didn't last long. Are you a surgeon?"

"Yes; one of the cavalry told me about him." He bent over Carton and gazed intently at his face. George held his breath.

"He seems perfectly normal now," said the surgeon, finishing his examination. "When he wakes give him this draught—it's a good bracer for the nerves. Good-night."

He handed the medicine to George, and left the tent without another word, as if his time were precious.

"Another narrow escape," muttered Carton, opening his eyes. "I tell you, George, now that I've gotten all the information necessary about the strength of the camp, I say let us get away from here as soon as possible."

"How soon?" asked the boy.

"Well, early to-morrow morning. In the meantime we must stay quietly in the tent until then, for the less we mix with our Southern friends, and the less you have to answer embarrassing questions about the worthy Pete Langston and his family, the better for the safety of our scalps."

Tired out with the travel of the day and the adventures of the afternoon and evening, George Knight soon sank down upon his blanket. He intended to stay awake, to keep the Captain company, but nature was not to be trifled with, and

he was fast asleep almost as soon as his head sank back. Not so Carton. He was terribly weary, to be sure, but he was gradually working himself up into a nervous condition which was not improved by the loneliness of his surroundings. Outside he could hear the occasional tread of a sentry—the enemy's sentry, worse luck—not one of his own army—and inside there was no sound but the gentle breathing of the boy. The candle on the little table gave a ghastly light and made the face of the sleeper look pale and uncanny.

Carton grew more and more restless; he moved, and turned from side to side, in his skimp bed, but all to no avail. A foreboding of evil took possession of his mind; he seemed to find nothing but darkness in the future—perhaps a gibbet. Then there rose up before him all that he had read, as a schoolboy, of the execution of Major André, that dashing but ill-advised young British officer who had made an unsuccessful attempt to betray West Point into the hands of the English army. He could fancy André stepping lightly upon the wagon which formed the platform of his gallows and saying: "I want

you all to bear witness that I died like a brave man!"

The Captain shuddered. But it was not for himself that he felt wrought up and nervous. He had come upon a perilous enterprise, and he was willing to meet courageously the results of that enterprise, be they what they might. It was for George Knight that he flinched in spirit. "It would break my heart," he said, "to see anything happen to the boy.

"Yet why should I get so gloomy?" he asked himself impatiently. "Everything has turned out all right so far; no one suspects us; to-morrow morning we can drive off from camp for all the world like two farmers, after we have pretended to leave a claim with General Van Dorn for our stolen chickens."

After a time Carton grew calmer. At last he fell asleep. When he awoke he looked at his watch, which he drew from a pocket in his trousers, and found that it was nearly midnight. George was still in the Land of Nod. Once he muttered: "Give me back those eggs!" The listener smiled. "The boy is dreaming of this afternoon," he thought. Then Carton relapsed

into an uneasy slumber, just as the ghostly candle, now burned down to the socket, flickered feverishly and went out.

It may have been about half an hour later when Carton slowly returned to consciousness. Was any one moving in the tent? He listened eagerly. No; there was no one in the tent except George, who was sleeping heavily—but immediately outside he heard, however faintly, the sound of voices. It seemed as if two persons were conversing in low tones at the very entrance of the tent.

The Captain quietly raised himself to a sitting posture and strained his ears. But although the voices continued, he could not catch one word. Quickly changing his position he silently crawled to the flap of the tent. Then he could distinguish, by close attention, the whispering of two men. He recognized one voice—a peculiarly sharp, rasping voice, as he recalled—as belonging to the fox-featured Confederate whom they had picked up in their wagon on their way to Spring Hill.

"Yes, Colonel," he was saying, "when I saw that boy this afternoon I knew I'd seen him in

Rosecrans's camp, only I couldn't remember where. His face puzzled me. He told me that he'd been in camp there selling things the day I spoke of, and that sort of took me in for a while. But to-night it just flashed over me where I really had seen the kid. I was being marched, with three other prisoners, past the house used by General Thomas, and there, sitting on the porch, was that boy, dressed in a Federal uniform. There can be no mistake; he's got a handsome face not easily to be forgotten. He is no more a farmer than I am. He's a spy, and so is that 'dumb' man. Dumb! I'll bet he can speak as well as I can!"

"Lawrence," whispered the other voice, "you've done the Confederacy a good service by this discovery of yours. I see the whole business now. These two fellows are simply masquerading as farmers to gain information here for Rosecrans. It was a clever trick, but it won't work, thanks to you."

"Will you arrest them now?" enquired Lawrence, anxiously.

"There's no use in dragging them out now and arousing the whole camp," answered the

Colonel. "But I'll go back to headquarters and send a couple of sentries here to guard their tent until they wake up in the morning; then the two rascals will find it rather hard to get back to that imaginary farm of theirs. But it was a plucky thing to do."

"It will be their last sleep on this side of the grave," murmured Lawrence. Then there was dead silence, and the listener could hear the steps of the two men as they quietly stole away.

"Here's a kettle of fish!" said Carton coolly. And going over to where George slept he shook him until the boy awoke. "What's the matter?" the latter asked, in wonderment.

"Hush!" whispered his companion. "Don't talk aloud or we are dead men. We have been found out. It is known that we are spies. In another minute there will be sentries here guarding our tent!"

"Is the game up?" asked the lad. Strange to say, he felt perfectly calm.

CHAPTER III

A BREAK FOR LIBERTY

"ARE you ready for any emergency?" demanded Captain Carton. He could not see George's face, but he felt sure, from the tone of the latter's voice, that the boy retained his presence of mind.

"Of course I am," whispered George. "Have you any plan?"

"There's only one thing to do now," replied Carton, "and that is to get away from this tent on the instant. If we can do that, the sentries who come here won't know that they are guarding nobody, and we can gain time. Heaven knows what we'll do after that—but anything's worth trying for."

As he spoke, the Captain crawled to the entrance of the tent and peered out. The night was pitch dark, fortunately enough; there was not a star, however dim, in the firmament. He turned his head in the direction of George, who

was now just behind him. "Come," he muttered, "away from this tent, quick!"

He fairly wriggled out of the tent on his stomach, and was followed by George. As they emerged from the canvas they looked like two large snakes crawling from a hole in a prairie.

Before them were hundreds of tents, and in the distance they could discern a solitary sentry, marching to and fro. Where were they to go now? Everywhere were enemies; there was not a friend within thirty miles of them; the outlook was cheerless, not to say desperate.

"What shall we do now?" asked George, in a hoarse whisper. Had it not been for the blackness of the night he might have expected that the sentry would have descended upon them the next instant.

Carton's idea as to his next step was vague, to say the least. His only thought was to leave the tent, over which two sentries were so soon to be posted. He crawled on for several minutes, with George behind him, wriggling in here and there between the other tents. At last he thought he could hear, in the distance, two soldiers taking up their positions in front of the

canvas which they had vacated so recently. "They think they are guarding something," he chuckled; "but when the stable door's opened to-morrow morning the horses will be gone." Yet the tone of triumph died on his lips. Where, he thought, could he and George flee in safety? Were they not rather caught like rats in a trap?

"Look!" whispered the boy. He pointed in front of them to a long, low shed or shanty. "The stable," he said.

It was, in fact, the building used as a stable for miscellaneous teams and camp vehicles, and in which the wagon and two horses brought by George and the Captain, had been placed for the night.

"That's where our wagon is," went on the boy, in an undertone.

"Stop!" whispered Carton. "I've an inspiration." The two came to a halt in the slushy, oozy ground. George was conscious of the fact that his shoes and trousers were covered with mud. The Captain paused, and then went on: "Let's walk boldly into the stable, say that we want to leave camp now, to get back to the farm

early, and then we will drive off beyond the lines. We're out of sight of those two sentries."

"But how are we to get beyond the lines?" queried George.

"Very easily, if we work our cards right. We are very near the road by which we came in in the afternoon. If I get back our wagon and horses I'll undertake to drive out without any one stopping us—and then good-bye forever to the camp of Spring Hill! Just leave yourself to me."

"Willingly," whispered George, who knew that any attempt to escape was better than none. If they remained in camp until daybreak they might as well mount the gallows, to be hung as spies, or encounter a firing squad, without any further ado.

Carton sprung to his feet, as did the boy likewise, and the two walked quickly over to the stable. "By Jove," exclaimed the former, as they stood within several feet of the door, "I had completely forgotten that I was dumb. George, you must go boldly in here, demand our team, and then drive out the road by the pickets. If they make any objection to our going, explain to

them that we came in during the afternoon to sell produce to General Van Dorn—that we are farmers anxious to get home soon, *et cetera*—and if that won't work, then, by the Stars and Stripes, we might as well make up our minds to hang—or to be shot gracefully."

"Any more instructions?" asked the boy. His spirits were fast rising, with the thought that he was once more to assume some responsibilities in this enterprise. Already, in imagination, could he see Carton and himself safely back in the camp at Murfreesboro.

"No more," answered Carton. "Only go in and win."

A few more steps brought them to the shanty which had been called, by courtesy, a stable. George knocked at the door. There was no response, so he threw it open, and walked in. Several weary soldiers, who were acting as hostlers, were sleeping on the ground, while one melancholy lantern threw a sickly light over the horses, tethered to stakes in the ground, and the rather mixed collection of commissary wagons.

George, with an air of authority, shook one of the men roughly by the shoulder. "Here, you,"

he cried, resuming his Tennessean drawl, "brother and I must get back to the farm by sunrise."

The man opened his eyes, stretched himself, and looked at the two intruders in a surly fashion. "What's up?" he demanded, when he had fully come to his senses.

George explained that he and his "brother" were the farmers who had come into camp to sell chickens, eggs, and bacon; that they had left their wagon and two horses here, and that they must be home, and at work, by sunrise.

The hostler, if such he might be called, slowly rose to his feet, and pointed to where the wagon was. The horses were tied near by. "Glad I ain't a farmer," he grumbled. "A soldier's life is bad enough—but a farmer's—oh, law! Go, get your wagon, and leave me to get a little sleep."

George and Carton, only too glad to act upon the hint, hurried to their wagon, hitched the horses to it, and were soon driving out of the stable. The hostler, who had seen or heard nothing to arouse his suspicions, was soon fast asleep again. The stable and its denizens were buried in slumber.

Over a roadway which led to the picket line, and thence out on the highway, George drove quickly, without any attempt at concealment, passing several sentries on the way. The latter made no sign; they had heard the team emerge from the stable, and they supposed, not unnaturally, that the commissary department was sending out for some supplies.

"Here comes the test," whispered Carton, who was on the seat alongside of the boy, as they approached the picket line. "Keep up a stiff upper lip, and use your brains as if the whole world depended on you."

"I'll do my best if only because your life depends on it," answered George, sturdily and affectionately. His was an awesome responsibility, as he realized only too keenly; if he was not adroit enough to get out of camp at once, their mission would be a failure, and death would end the incident. But he resolved to be cool and collected; if he lost his head, figuratively speaking, there might be a rope around it, in grim reality, within twenty-four hours, and his companion would find himself in the same unpleasant predicament.

It seemed an hour before they came to the picket line on the outskirts of the camp. Actually it was scarcely more than a couple of minutes. George stopped the wagon. Through the darkness two pickets, carrying their muskets at right shoulder, hurried up to the fugitives.

"Who are you? Give the countersign!" cried one of them, bringing his gun to "carry arms."

"What's the good o' counter-what-do-you-call-'ems?" demanded George. "I'm leaving camp —not a tryin' to get in it." And then he proceeded to explain that he and his "dumb brother" were farmers who had come into camp in the afternoon and were anxious to get back to their farm by "sun-up."

The two soldiers came up and peered through the gloom at the faces of the farmers. "It may be all right," said the man who had previously spoken, "but I don't know you, and people don't usually leave camp at this early hour."

George now pretended to become angry. "Well, the next time we come here to sell you uns food we'll know it. First some o' you rush on our wagon and steal half o' what's in it, and then, when we are a tryin' to get home to

begin work by sun-up, you want to stop us. The Yankees treat us farmers a deal better than that, you jest bet."

"Oh, I know who these fellows are," interrupted the second picket; "at least I heard as some of the cavalry made a raid on the wagon of two farmers yesterday afternoon and got away with a lot of chickens. These must be the ones."

The first man hesitated. It was a trying moment. Upon his decision might depend the fate of two lives. George's heart beat so fast that he wondered if its pulsations could be heard by the soldiers.

"Look here," said the picket, at last, "it's mighty early in the morning, and if you jays wanted to leave at such an hour you should have had sense enough to get a pass or an order of some kind. I shan't take the responsibility of letting you out; you must wait till later."

Here was a wretched situation. Both the "farmers" now gave themselves up for lost. Before they could get away from camp daylight would come, and by that time the sentries guarding their tent would find that it was empty.

Then there would be a hue and cry; a search would be made.

Still George resolved not to lose his nerve. "It's a pretty mean way to treat us," he continued, "and yer ought to see it's so your own self."

"Oh, let the poor devils go," urged the second picket. "What harm can it do?"

"No, I don't dare do that," reiterated the other, "but I tell you what I will do——"

George's heart lightened. What was the man going to propose?

"I'll walk over to headquarters," he continued, "and if I can get any one awake over there, I'll ask permission to pass you both out."

Carton moved uneasily in his seat, while George's spirits sank to their lowest depths. By "headquarters" the picket must mean the house occupied by General Van Dorn's staff, and it was probable that it was already known there that the private Lawrence had found the "farmers" to be Union spies.

"How will that suit you?" asked the first picket, with the tone of a man who expects to be thanked.

"Thank you," said George, who felt in anything but a thanking humor.

"Harry," went on the picket, "stay here, while I go over to headquarters." With that he disappeared in the darkness, leaving his companion guarding the strangers and their team.

"If it rested with me, boys," said "Harry," quite apologetically, "I would have let you both through."

George thought he saw one faint hope. "Then why don't you let us go now," he asked, in a plausible, wheedling voice.

"No, you don't," answered the Confederate, this time rather sharply. "So long as my partner wouldn't allow it I ain't going to go back on him, and get myself into trouble in the bargain. Anyway, he may bring back a pass for you."

"More likely bring back a halter for us," thought the boy. "The game is up—the hounds have caught the hare."

But a new thought had dashed like lightning through Carton's ingenious brain. It meant the one chance of escape for himself and George,

and he acted upon it instantly. Jumping from the wagon he suddenly threw himself on the picket and hit him a great blow on the forehead. The man fell as if he had been shot; and as he sank backward the musket, which his nerveless fingers relinquished, clattered on the ground. In another second George had leaped from the wagon.

"Run for your life!" whispered Carton. In a twinkling the spies were running up the highway, beyond the picket lines, and second by second were putting the team and the prostrate picket further and further behind them. "Captain," cried George, breathlessly, "you've saved us!"

"Don't know that I have," panted Carton; "we're not out of the woods yet." But there was room for hope.

On, on, they ran, till at length they heard loud cries in the camp. Then came the sharp crack of several muskets. "They have found out that we've escaped," muttered Carton. "In another minute they'll be in hot pursuit!"

George stopped short in the muddy road. "If they send any of the cavalry out for us

we're done for," he gasped, "unless we can get away from this road, and hide."

Captain Carton who had suddenly come to a halt, pointed through the darkness to a spot a hundred yards up the road. "If I remember rightly," he said, "that's a bridge that we went over yesterday afternoon. Let's get under it."

The outcry in camp continued. Looking back the fugitives could see a number of lights. It was evident that a general alarm had been given. "Come," urged Carton. "To the bridge!"

On they ran until they reached what proved, most fortunately, to be the bridge which the Captain had remembered. Here they made a halt. "Crawl under here, somewhere or somehow," commanded the Captain. "It's our only chance."

Never afterwards could the boy exactly explain how he did crawl under that bridge—which was nothing more than a wooden planking across a little stream—but he contrived to do it in some shape, and was closely followed by the Captain. Hardly had they reached this point of vantage before they could hear the

clink of horses' feet upon the road. Nearer and nearer came the sound.

"Just in time!" whispered Carton. He was crouching, next to George, on a slushy bank about six feet below the timbers of the bridge. By them ran, or rather meandered, a sluggish creek. Carton, who was feverish from excitement, dipped his hat into the water, and threw the contents over his head. Then he replaced his hat. "That's a relief," he said. He and George had had the presence of mind to take their hats from the tent.

On came the sound of horsemen.

"I thought they would get the cavalry after us," said Carton. "We would have been caught if we'd kept on the road, or even scurried off to the side of it."

George pressed one of his companion's hands. "If it hadn't been for your knocking down the picket," he said, "we would have been in camp now. I owe my life to you."

"Pshaw!" replied the Indianian. "I'm only sorry that I had to punish such a decent fellow as 'Harry.' If it had rested with him he would have let us off."

The fact was, as the fugitives learned in after years, that just as "Harry" came to his senses, little the worse for his encounter with Carton, he found the other picket running back to him, accompanied by several soldiers. In his enquiries at headquarters this first picket had discovered that the alleged farmers were spies, and he tore back again with the intention of arresting them. But the birds had flown. Then came an alarm, and the pursuit of cavalry.

Over the bridge rushed a dozen Confederate horsemen, shaking particles of mud upon the heads of the two hiding beneath. They were urging on their animals with hoarse cries, and the fugitives plainly heard one man say: "Those Yankees can't be far away. We must catch up to them in a minute!"

"What if the men should hunt for us under here?" George ventured to ask, after the cavalcade had passed.

"If they do, they'll simply find us," laughed Carton. "But let us hope it will never occur to them to look here."

Half an hour passed away. George and Carton were now sitting on the bank, still under

the bridge. "I'm beginning to feel stiff," said George.

"You'll feel stiffer before we get through with this," muttered his companion. He spoke truly, for nearly an hour elapsed before they could hear the cavalry returning. By that time George felt as if none of his joints would ever again be limber.

Back swept the horsemen, over the bridge. It seemed as if they were grumbling among themselves. In a few moments they clattered into camp, to announce that the pursuit had, thus far, proved a failure.

"Now comes the rub," said Carton, when they were out of hearing. "Shall we stay here, or get away, and make towards Murfreesboro? If we stay here we may be routed out; if we go back to the highroad we may be caught by another hunting party."

"If we do stay here," answered George, "daylight will overtake us in a while, and then we may have to pass another twenty-four hours under this bridge, which wouldn't be pleasant, to say the least. We could never get away from here in broad daylight, as we are so near the

camp. Why not steal off now, when the road is clear, and before another pursuing party is organized?"

"I guess you're right," assented Carton. "Here we go!" He scrambled from under the bridge, followed by George. Another minute found them on the highroad.

"And now for Murfreesboro!" said Carton, adding, under his breath, "if we ever get there."

"What's your plan of action?" asked George, as they walked along the road.

"Providence knows," answered the Captain, vaguely but cheerfully. "We must trust to chance. We have been trusting to chance for the past two or three hours, and have come out safely thus far, so let us go on in the same way, and see what turns up. Do you see those three stars struggling through the black sky? The day will be clear."

So they trudged on towards Murfreesboro, which seemed such a long way off, without meeting a soul in the darkness. At length the day began to dawn; a little later there was a rosy hue in the east; at last came the sunrise. There was a chill in the air, but the day promised to be

warm. Carton halted in the road, and looked steadfastly at George. They were both covered with mud, due to their sojourn under the bridge, and appeared in anything but a prepossessing garb.

"It's probable," said the Captain, "that the daylight will bring another party of cavalrymen scurrying over this road to hunt us. And as we can't beat them on foot, therefore ——"

"Therefore," continued the boy, "the sooner we get off the road to some safe hiding-place the better. Later, after the cavalry have gone on, we can keep on our journey."

"Spoken like an oracle," laughed Carton. "But where are we to hide?"

Just then George gave a little cry of surprise. "There's a house," he said. He pointed to a two-story brick double house which was about two hundred yards ahead of them, to the right, standing some fifty feet back from the roadway. There was a portico in front of the building, which was flanked by an old-fashioned barn and numerous outhouses. "Shall we try that?" he asked.

Carton hesitated. But as he stood irresolute

in the road he suddenly looked back towards Spring Hill. Then he sank upon his knees, and bent his head to the ground. "I was not mistaken," he said hurriedly. "I hear the sound of horses' hoofs. More cavalry are coming after us. Let's make for the house, come what may!"

Without another word he dashed up the road, with George at his heels, until he reached the two white wooden pillars which marked the entrance to the farm. Unfastening the gate, the two ran up the wide garden path. Clink, clink, came the sound far away, of Confederate horsemen.

"There's no use trying to get into the house," exclaimed George. "No one's up; and even if we got in we might only be betrayed!"

"To the stable!" cried Carton. He ran to the left of the mansion until he reached the barn, with the boy close behind him. He tried the door, but it was tightly shut.

"Here, get in the window," whispered George. To the right of the door was an open window, just big enough to admit a not overly-large man. Through it the lad tumbled, head-over-heels, and then dragged the Captain in after him.

"Out of the frying pan into the fire," laughed the latter. "First a bridge, then a barn—and Fate knows when we will get out of this."

"Anything's better than a prison in Van Dorn's camp," said George. He looked critically around him. On one side of the stable were stalls for five horses, three of which were occupied; on the other side four sleepy cows were tethered; in the rear of the building was a room containing wagons and farm implements. Upstairs there was evidently a large hay loft, to which a ladder led from the ground floor.

"Listen!" exclaimed Carton. The sound of the horses was nearer than ever now. He cautiously peered out of the window through which they had entered. "There are eight cavalrymen at the gate of the farm," he whispered. "They are having a discussion among themselves." A minute later he hastily drew his head back into the barn. "They are coming up to the house," he explained.

He spoke truly. The two Federals could hear the men galloping up the path. They reached the house and reined up. One of them apparently leaped from his horse, and then began to

pound fiercely at the front door. "Here, Farmer What's-your-name!" he called in loud, ringing tones. "What are you sleeping in bed so late for? Don't you know farmers should be up before sunrise? Get up—the army of the Confederacy has business with you."

There was a pause. At last shutters and a window, evidently in the second story, were opened, and the occupants of the barn heard the following colloquy:

Cavalryman (impatiently): "What's the matter with you? Do you expect to run a farm keeping these late hours?"

Farmer (in a crusty voice): "You keep to your trade and I'll look after mine. If I sleep late in the winter I'll bet I get up two hours earlier than you do in summer—and work harder all the year round."

Laughter from the other cavalrymen.

Cavalryman: "We won't discuss that. We have come here to tell you that two Federal spies have escaped from the camp at Spring Hill. They're on this road somewhere, trying to sneak back to Murfreesboro. One is a grown man, medium height, with a smooth face; the other's a

boy of sixteen or thereabouts, tall for his age. They pretend to be farmers. Now if by any chance they show up in this neighborhood they must be held, and General Van Dorn notified at once. And I want you to keep your eyes open and warn all your neighbors this morning—yes, and within an hour, too."

Farmer (crossly): "Why don't you do it yourselves? There are eight of you."

Cavalryman: "Because we must keep to the road. Now do what I tell you, or it'll be the worse for you."

Farmer: "All right. I had a lot o' work on hand for this morning, but I'm just as good a friend o' the South as you are, although I ain't paid for being one like you, and so I'll ride out and warn the folks around here."

"All right, see that you do," said the cavalryman, who was plainly the leader of the party. "Come, boys, let's get out on the highway again!"

There was a bustle among the men which was suddenly arrested by the leader's quick exclamation of surprise. "By Jinks!" he cried. "There are a pair of fresh footprints!" There was a

pause; then he proceeded, in much excitement: "Look! Those prints come up the road and go to that barn yonder!"

"How d'ye know the marks are fresh?" enquired one of his companions, rather doubtingly.

"I'll tell you why I know. Look at the footprints in the mud near the right forefoot of your horse. Don't you see that the water from the road is trickling into it in a thin stream. Had that print been made yesterday the water would have run into it long ago. Besides, any one could tell, from their appearance, that these prints have just been made."

It may be imagined what eager but startled listeners George and Carton were to this conversation.

"Zounds!" whispered the Captain. "Are those farmers' boots of ours, trailing through the mud, going to be our ruin?"

"We can't stay here," urged George.

"It's no use in running out," answered Carton. "They would only shoot us down like rabbits. Let's get up into the hayloft. We've each a pistol concealed about us, and if we must meet

death let it come now. We'll sell our lives dearly!"

As he spoke he sprang up the ladder which led to the hayloft, and George came scrambling after him. They found themselves in a large room running the whole length of the building, directly under the roof, and with a window at each end, front and back. The place was half filled with hay and contained, in addition, several old, rusty ploughs and some broken furniture.

Already could they hear some one pounding at the stable door. "Come out of that barn!" cried the voice of the leader, "whoever you are."

Carton stole over to the window in the front of the loft and looked cautiously out. Immediately below was the dismounted leader, beating at the door with his sabre, while around him, likewise dismounted, were his seven men, carrying carbines. The horses had been tied to a long wooden hitching-rod near the house.

The Captain moved away from the window. "It looks pretty black for us," he said. "Eight armed men against two. But we're not dead yet. Let us stand at the head of this ladder—

which is the only means they have of getting up into this loft—and I can blaze away at every man who attempts to climb up!"

"Good!" cried the boy. "Only one man can get up at a time. We will have the advantage."

They brought from under their coarse shirts their respective revolvers. Carton produced from a pocket in his trousers a quantity of cartridges which he handed to George. "You had better keep these to reload the pistols, if necessary, and that will give me time to fire, and fire quickly."

Bang! bang! went the leader, still pounding at the door with his sabre. "Come out of that!" he called again. "I'm sure we have caught our two spies," he added to his men.

By this time the farmer must have appeared on the scene, for the fugitives heard him say, contemptuously: "Like as not two drunken niggers have crawled in there and gone to sleep."

"Break down this door!" thundered the leader. In a moment the butts of several carbines were pounding on the door, which soon gave way with a crash.

"Now for it!" whispered Carton.

Into the barn rushed the men, headed by their leader. The two Northerners above could hear them as they searched through the stalls, and then hurried back to explore the carriage room. Carton stood at the opening of the loft looking down upon the ladder. In his right hand he held his loaded revolver. The other revolver, and the ammunition, were in the possession of George, who stood immediately behind him. Both of them wore determined expressions on their faces; both of them felt very calm, as brave persons do when danger actually arrives.

Soon the cavalrymen came running back from the carriage room. "They must be hiding upstairs," cried the leader. As he spoke he hurried over to the ladder and began to climb it.

Crack! A bullet from Carton's revolver buried itself in the leader's left shoulder, and he, more startled than dangerously hurt, tumbled from the ladder into the arms of one of his command.

"Come on," shouted Carton, who now began to taste the excitement of battle; "come on, and I'll serve you all the same way!" To this warlike sentiment George added by giving a lusty cheer.

The leader had evidently recovered from his surprise, for they heard him say: "Oh, I'm all right; it's only a flesh wound. I'll try them again."

"Don't be so foolhardy," interposed the voice of another cavalryman. "The second time you go up the ladder you'll be shot for good and all. Only one can get up that ladder at a time, and as each one goes up he'll be quickly picked off from above."

This argument, being full of common sense, evidently appealed to the leader. "Have you got any better plan?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "Come away from that ladder, and I'll tell you what it is."

The men moved away towards the door of the barn. George and the Captain could hear them talking in whispers. "What on earth can they be concocting now?" asked the former.

"Nothing pleasant for us," replied Carton grimly. "I'm sorry they didn't try coming up the ladder. We were nicely prepared for them."

"They showed their sense in not coming up," observed the boy.

Suddenly they heard the voice of the farmer raised in angry protest.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" he shouted. "I'll report you to your General! It's an outrage!"

"Report away, old boy," rejoined the leader, whose wound did not, apparently, cause him overmuch inconvenience. "You'll get no sympathy. All is fair in war—particularly where spies are concerned."

"It's a shame!" fairly screamed the farmer. "You'll ruin me. I've slaved all my life to keep body and soul together on this here farm, and now, just as I'm a-beginnin' to see daylight, you devils come here to ——"

"Get out!" savagely interrupted the leader. "If you say another word I'll put you under arrest, and take you off to Spring Hill."

There was a scuffling which indicated that the farmer was being pushed out of the stable. Then the cavalrymen left the building. All was silence down-stairs.

"What deviltry do you think these fellows are plotting against us?" asked Carton, looking at his companion and toying with his pistol.

"Something good for them, and bad for us," returned George. "They are no fools!"

Just then some one reëntered the barn. It was the farmer, for his voice could be heard wailing: "It's a sin—a sin—a burning shame!" Then he went from stall to stall and released the horses, which he led out of the building. In several minutes he was back, and it was clear to those above that he had released the cows. Soon these animals were walking out of the barn in their slow awkward way.

"What on earth can they be going to do?" queried George. He felt exactly as if he were looking on at some play whose plot he could not understand. How was the drama to end? Why had the cows and horses been removed?

Carton gave a sharp cry, almost as of one in pain. "I see the whole thing!" he said. "They are going to burn the barn! They will roast us out, just as if we were rats, and then, when we are forced to quit here, they'll capture us!"

George gasped. The idea was not agreeable, to say the least. The alternative of burning to death or capture, was not alluring. He walked to the front window of the loft, and gazed out.

The cavalry horses were still tethered in front of the farmer's house, and they were now joined by the horses from the stable. The farmer was driving the cows into a pasture on one side of the road leading from the house to the highway. The men were outside, near the barn door, talking to their wounded leader.

"I've got an idea!" said George, hurrying back to Carton.

"Out with it—quick, then. No time to lose!"

"The cavalry are all near the door. They'll expect us to run out of that door when the fire gets started here. Instead of doing that, why not drop from the back window of this loft—it isn't so high that it will hurt us, and make a bee-line for the cavalry horses that are hitched near the house—each mount one—and be off, out of the place, and along the road towards Murfreesboro?"

Carton put his revolver back under his shirt. "It's a desperate chance," he said, "but it's our only one. We may get shot—but on the other hand we may escape. You are not afraid to try it, Georgie?"

George, who had concealed under his shirt

his own pistol and the cartridges, merely answered: "Feel my heart, Captain. It beats as regularly as if I were in headquarters with General Thomas."

"I don't need to feel it," said Carton. "Heaven knows I have never doubted your bravery. I only thought it fair to warn you of the risks we are taking."

"I am ready to take them," replied the boy.

"Then here we go, lad. And may Providence give us wings!"

CHAPTER IV

ON TOWARDS MURFREESBORO

As Carton and George spoke they heard a man enter the stable below. They paused for a moment, while they listened intently. They could hear him go into a stall; then there came a rustling in the straw, the striking of a match, and, soon afterwards, an omnious, crackling sound.

"Come," commanded the Captain, touching the boy on the arm. "The barn's on fire!"

They hurried to the back window of the loft. Carton opened the casement, threw out his legs and balanced himself for the space of a second on the sill. As he looked down he gave an exclamation of pleasure. No one was stationed at the back of the building; it was plain that the spies were expected to make a dash from the front door.

"Can you squeeze alongside of me?" he asked, anxiously. "Let us drop together, if we can."

GEORGE COULD NOT HELP LOOKING BACK AND SHAKING HIS FIST

Fortunately the sill was wide, so that George was able to sit upon it.

"Now drop!" whispered Carton.

On that signal both leaped to the ground, unhurt, and made a spurt for the horses. Already could they hear the crackling of straw and timbers in the doomed stable.

After they emerged from the back of the burning building and passed on to their goal, there arose a yell of angry surprise and dismay from the cavalrymen.

"Run for your life!" urged Carton. Run they did; each unhitched a soldier's horse, and, giving the startled beasts the rein, turned them in the direction of the highroad. Whiz, whiz, went the bullets from the men's carbines, as the spies dashed madly off. But none of them hit either horses or riders. George could not help looking back, as he sped on, and shaking his fist in the faces of his enemies. His answer was a yell of execration. He saw the cavalrymen—all, at least, save the wounded leader, make a wild rush for what remained of their horse contingent, and he saw, too, six men mount into the saddle.

"They're after us!" said the boy, as they raced into the highroad, and turned the heads of their animals in the direction of Murfreesboro.

"Let 'em come," cried Carton, who had suddenly become almost jubilant. "I feel ready for anything now."

"My horse looks like a gritty fellow," said George, as they galloped on. He was mounted on a long-legged bay horse which, if not exactly handsome or blooded, gave unmistakable signs of possessing endurance.

"I took a good one blindly," returned the Captain. He had accidentally chosen the best horse of all—a fleet Kentucky mare, black as night, full of spirit, and fleet of foot.

"How long can we keep up this pace?" asked the boy.

"Why just as long—perhaps longer than the other fellows can. Our chance is as good as theirs is. As for the rest, we must trust to luck."

They galloped past an old negro who was driving a pair of oxen attached to a cumbersome cart. The man looked at them half frightened, as if they were flying spirits.

On, too, came the six cavalrymen, who seemed

to be gaining, however slightly, upon the two in front. George started to urge on his horse to even greater speed.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Carton.

"Those fellows are gaining on us a little," he answered. Just at that moment there was a report behind them and a bullet grazed George's ear.

"Come, girl," cried Carton, speaking to his mare; "let's put a little more distance between those gentlemen and ourselves."

He soon increased the speed of the animal, and he and George flew onward towards the Union camp, still so many miles away. Fields of stubble, woods, and an occasional farmhouse, passed before them like a panorama of quickly moving objects.

After they had gone another half a mile in this rapid fashion, and the two horses showed signs of tiring, Carton looked behind him. "By Jove," he said, "we are outdistancing the enemy. They are falling behind." It was true. The pursuers were now much more in the rear than they had been.

"Go on for a little while, old girl," said the Captain, "and then we'll let you walk." He patted the horse's head, and the noble animal, seeming to understand what was expected of her, quickened her pace. Her endurance acted as a spur upon George's horse, which kept on spiritedly. In another ten minutes the two fugitives reined in their perspiring steeds and once more looked behind them. As they did so they uttered exclamations of delight. Back in the highroad, as they could see, the six horsemen had come to a standstill.

"Good!" cried Carton. "We have gotten the better of them!"

He and George now brought their horses into a walk and gave them a much needed rest. "This is what I call blind luck," laughed the Captain. "We accidentally chose the two best horses of the party."

"If you get me out of this scrape safely," said George, stroking the mane of his own animal, "I'll see to it that you have free oats all the days of your life." The long-legged bay gave a whinny, as if to return thanks for such a generous sentiment.

It was evident that the pursuit had been abandoned. "I think we're out of the woods at last," said Carton. "We should get into camp late this afternoon if all goes well. My, but I'm hungry. I could eat a whole sheep."

They ambled on for half an hour with no further hint of the cavalrymen. Suddenly George began to feel very sick and dizzy; he reeled in his saddle, and seemed in danger of falling.

"What's the matter?" asked his companion anxiously.

"Nothing," answered the boy. But even as he spoke the reins fell from his grasp; he lurched like a drunken man. Carton stopped both horses, and stretching out one arm seized hold of George. "George," he cried; "you are ill!"

"Not a bit," answered the lad bravely. But his looks belied him. He was deathly pale and trembling like a leaf. His teeth began to chatter; he most assuredly had a chill.

Carton relinquished his hold of the boy, leaped from his horse, and then dragged the invalid from his own animal and helped him to the side

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of the road. George sat down on a muddy bank, where he shook as if he had the palsy.

"Look out for the horses," chattered George. He spoke just in time. In his anxiety over the lad the Captain had left the animals standing in the road, and they were now turning around with their heads towards Spring Hill. In another minute they would have been galloping, riderless, back to the Confederate camp. Carton hastily ran to the middle of the road, grasped them by the bridles and walked between them over towards George. The latter was now lying flat upon his back as convulsive tremors seemed to be running up and down his whole body.

Carton became frightened, not for his own safety or that of George, although he knew that pursuit of them might not yet be discontinued—but because he feared the boy had some sort of a fit. "Perhaps he is dying," he thought, "and I can do nothing for him!"

"Calculate he's sick?" came a nasal voice, as if from the clouds. Carton jumped as if he had been shot, and saw, coming towards him from the direction of Murfreesboro, a lean, lanky man mounted on a decrepit mule. Indeed he was

almost alongside of the fugitives when he spoke. His shabby dress indicated that he was one of the poorer class of white farmers or planters; his white beard, unkempt but profuse, hung down almost to the level of his saddle; his eyes were shrewd yet honest; and his general appearance proved conclusively that he was a man of sixty-five or seventy who had found most of those years to be a pretty hard struggle.

The Captain hailed the stranger as if he had been a succoring angel. "Come here, friend, do," he entreated. "This poor boy has got something dreadful the matter with him!"

The stranger dismounted, left his mule in the middle of the road, where it remained as patiently as if it were securely tied, and walked slowly over to the sick boy. The latter was just in the midst of another spasm.

The man eyed him critically and in a kindly, fatherly way, but not with the slightest expression of alarm.

"Can he be dying?" whispered the distraught Captain, still holding the horses.

"Dying?" echoed the man. His voice had nothing of the Southern inflection in it; rather

did it suggest the hard, dry tone to be heard, in old times, among a certain class of New England farmers. "Dying? Don't you guess what's the matter with him?"

"Fits?" enquired Carton, tremulously.

"Only ague!" said the other. "Why I guess you can't belong around here if you don't know ague when you see it. We've lots of it in these parts—and it never kills."

This answer lifted a load of anxiety from the Captain's mind, but it also aroused him to the stern necessity of inventing some plausible story to account for his presence on the road. For the time being it seemed as if all his creative genius had left him. At last he said: "We come from Franklin County and we're going to visit friends in Nashville."

"Franklin County, Tennessee?" asked he of the white beard.

"Exactly."

"Well, you can't have lived in the State long," was the reply. "You talk like a Northerner."

"I'll tell you my family history some other time," cried Carton impatiently. "Only help me with this boy now."

"Didn't mean no offense, brother," said the stranger. "As for this boy he's got a fit of ague, which will soon pass off. A night's rest will fix him up all right."

"Let's be getting on," suddenly urged George, sitting up on the bank. The chill had left him as quickly as it had appeared, although he looked very pale, and there was a feverish glitter in his eyes.

"You'll be crazy, lad, if you try to ride on now," explained the man, with a touch of genuine sympathy in his nasal voice. "The ague down here always leaves a fellow very weak for a few hours."

"Oh, I'm perfectly well again," chirped George. He immediately disproved his statement by trying to stand up and then falling back upon the bank.

"What did I tell you?" said the old farmer.

"What can I do with him?" asked Carton. He realized that the sooner he could get the boy away from the road the better would it be for the safety of them both. At any minute another pursuing party might be sent after them from Spring Hill. But where to go?

"I ain't got a castle to live in," said the stranger, "but, sich as it is, you're welcome to it to spend to-day and the night in. I'll give the boy some of that stuff they call quinine, and by to-morrow morning he'll be fine as a fiddle."

Carton did not like the idea of lingering in the enemy's region, particularly when the whole countryside might be on the lookout for George and himself, but he had no alternative. George could not travel on horseback that day. So he promptly accepted the Tennessean's well-meant proffer of hospitality. "But heaven knows," he thought, "what new hornets' nest we may be getting into now."

After some little discussion the man, who announced that his name was Hiram Hubbard and that his farm was about a mile back from the highroad, put himself and George on his ancient mule, and started for home. Carton came behind, mounted on his mare and leading the bay horse. They kept along the road, towards Murfreesboro, for about half a mile, and then turned into a lane flanked by fields upon which some of the last fall of snow still remained and which were dotted, here and there, with trees of red

cedar. After proceeding slowly up this lane for the allotted mile the party rode funereally into a farm of perhaps twenty acres or more. In the middle of the plot stood a long one-story brick house, with a small white portico in front. Back of the building was a small barn, and in the vicinity were a corn crib, a not overly-sweet pig-pen, and a sheepfold.

"Here's my farm," explained Hiram Hubbard, almost apologetically, "and it's a hard thing to make two ends meet on it, I can tell you."

"Still, you must be fond of it," said Carton, in an endeavor to be polite to his new host. "I suppose you were born on the place?"

"Born on the place!" echoed the farmer. "Jerusha, no! My family all come from Connecticut, and they have lived in Connecticut since it was founded. But I emigrated to Tennessee about thirty years ago, bought this ground—and here I've lived since. I might have done worse; I might have done better. But I'm still a Yankee!"

Carton's spirits rose within him. He had not run his head into the lion's mouth, after all. Here was a man who proclaimed that he was

"still a Yankee!" Might that not mean that the "Yankee" would have sympathy with the two spies in their attempt, this far frustrated, to get back to the Union camp? But before he could pursue the subject further in his own mind they had reached the house.

Hubbard, who had been holding George in front of him, jumped from the mule and then helped the boy to the ground. The latter looked weak and pale; it was evident that he needed rest after the attack of ague. Carton next dismounted from the mare.

"If you'll be kind enough to open the front door, and walk in the settin'-room," said the host, "I'll take the mule and your two horses 'round to the barn." As he spoke he gave the mule a gentle push, and it walked slowly over to the barn, whilst Hubbard brought up the rear, leading the two horses.

The Captain, who now had one hand around George's waist, made use of the other hand to pound on the door. There was no response.

"Don't wait at the door," cried Hubbard, on his way to the barn; "my wife's deef; she'll never hear that pounding."

So Carton boldly opened the door, and ushered George into the "settin'-room." It was a small, low-ceiled apartment, flanked on either side, as he afterwards observed, by a bedroom, and having, back of it, a large kitchen, which was also used as a dining-room. This "settin'-room" was plainly but comfortably furnished. On the walls hung engravings, which happened to be portraits of George Washington, John Adams and Daniel Webster; at one corner was a large chimney and hearth, from which blazed, despite the warmth of the day, a cheery wood-fire; and at a little table in the centre of the room sat a wrinkled, wizened old lady, who was knitting what seemed to be a coverlet or afghan.

Carton shut the door, and made a polite bow to the knitter. She rose from her chair, returned the bow, and motioned the strangers to sit down upon a sofa near the fire. They accepted the invitation. "It's a cold day," she said, in a feeble, cracked voice.

Carton did not think it was by any means cold, but he was too polite to contradict the old lady, who had evidently reached a time of life when her sluggish circulation made all days feel wintry.

So he made a gesture which was intended to say: "Yes, it's very cold." Then she sat down and resumed her knitting. An old-fashioned upright clock in one corner ticked monotonously. The hostess went on knitting, as her face would pucker up into a thousand wrinkles whenever she came to a stitch that was more difficult than the one before. A black cat strolled in from the kitchen, and rubbed herself against George's legs, with loud purrs of contentment.

"A black cat," said Carton. "That means good luck."

"I hope so," answered the boy, rather despondingly, as he stroked her ladyship on the back. "But I don't deserve any good luck after getting sick this way. I had no right to prevent your getting back to camp by this evening. You should have ridden on and left me."

The Captain merely laughed. "Don't be a goose," he said. "I would no more desert you under such circumstances than you would desert me. And it isn't your fault that you got the ague. How do you feel now?"

"Better," rejoined George. "But how are we

to get out of this new complication, which I have brought you into?"

"Don't worry," answered Carton. "We have done pretty well so far; we will do equally well again, and by to-morrow night we will be recounting our adventures to General Rosecrans and General Thomas."

"Or else be adorning a gallows," observed George. His attack had left him very weak; he felt gloomy, for the first time since he had entered upon this enterprise. He could not forget that he was endangering the Captain's life by the delay which this fit of ague had caused.

At this moment Hubbard entered the room. Walking up to his wife he said: "The boy here has got the ague. Where's the quinine?"

"Cryin'! who?" asked the old lady, putting a hand up to her left ear.

"Cryin', nothin', mother," returned the farmer, with some asperity. "I tell you this boy has had a spell of ague, and he needs quinine."

It took some time to make Mrs. Hubbard understand what the situation was, but, when she had at last mastered it, she began to bustle around

with an energy that was simply wonderful. She dosed George with the medicine, and then made him lie down upon a sofa in the "settin'-room"; she insisted on covering him up with a quilt, and then poured two glasses of milk down his throat. Furthermore, when Carton, who was beginning to be famished, asked for something to eat, she prepared for him a rasher of bacon and two fried eggs, which he devoured with the eagerness of a starving hyena.

When all these duties had been attended to the old lady sat down once again at the table, and resumed her knitting. Carton occupied a chair on one side of the fireplace; the farmer sat opposite to him; the boy slumbered near by, upon the sofa.

"Where's Joshua?" suddenly enquired Mrs. Hubbard.

Hubbard pointed towards the west, and made several gesticulations. They were perfectly clear to his wife, who shook her head to signify that she understood. "She's speakin' of my son, Josh. He's over at G——, buyin' flour. I suppose you're fer the South in this war?" he went on, suddenly looking at the Captain.

"Of course," answered the Union officer, not forgetting his part.

"Well," said Hubbard, "my son Josh is as great a rebel as ever lived. He thinks all the Yankees have hair on their teeth and ought to be shot on sight. Strange, though, when he was born in Connecticut thirty-two years ago, that he should hate his own kind. But he's been brought up here—and that makes the difference."

"What are your sympathies?" asked the Captain, as he devoutly hoped that he might not see much of the violent "Josh."

The old man was about to reply when the door opened and there walked into the room a tall, stalwart fellow with a red face, blond moustache, and handsome features. His mouth was firmly set; his eyes full of intelligence, and his general expression denoted great determination.

"Well, Josh, did you get the flour?" asked his father.

"Yes; I brought it over in the wagon," answered Joshua. He looked in surprise at the two strangers. His father thereupon explained to him why he had brought "Mr. Andrews" and his sick brother ("Andrews" was the name the

two had given their host) to the farm. Joshua gave Carton a curt nod and kept silent.

"Anything new at the store?" queried Hubbard.

Joshua walked over to the mantelpiece and stood with his back to the fire, in imminent danger of burning off the tails of his corduroy jacket. "There was one thing very new," he said significantly. "Two Federal spies escaped, early this morning, from the camp at Spring Hill. They are in this section somewhere, and General Van Dorn has sent out a general alarm to capture them."

Carton tried to appear unconcerned, or, at least, nothing more than politely interested. George slept on, in happy ignorance of the approach of danger.

"Have they given a description of the men?" asked the father.

"Yes," answered Joshua, looking very keenly at Carton. "The description of the men is complete. One is a boy—the other a grown man, and both are dressed like farmers. Very much as you are dressed, Mr. Andrews!"

"What in creation do you mean?" demanded

Carton, springing to his feet, quickly followed by the old man.

"I simply mean, my friend, that to any one who has half an eye in his head, and has heard the description of these spies, you and that boy on the sofa are the two fellows wanted!"

Carton was about to make an angry denial, when the futility of such a proceeding impressed itself upon him. It was not possible to deceive Joshua. So he merely went over to the lounge where George slept, and gently shook him. The boy opened his eyes, stretched himself, and asked: "Why do you bother me, Captain? I was sleeping so comfortably."

"I woke you," answered the Captain in quick, nervous tones, "because we have been accused of being spies by this gentleman here"—pointing to Joshua—"and you must be on your guard!"

George sat up and eyed the younger Hubbard with no very affectionate glances. The old lady dropped her knitting on the table and exclaimed: "Law's a mercy me! What's ailin' you all. Have any more sheep been killed by those dogs o' Jerre Lee's?"

The husband leaned over and shouted in her

ear: "No; it's nothing for you to hear. Go into the kitchen and git the churn ready for the milk."

The old woman waddled away, evidently disgusted, for she feared she might be missing a choice bit of countryside scandal.

Then the three men and the boy gazed fixedly upon one another. It was a dramatic tableau, into which action was almost immediately interjected by the burly Joshua. Pulling a large pistol from his belt he swung it lightly in his right hand as he said half savagely, half ironically: "No doubt you gentlemen carry firearms—it's a necessity in your business—but if either o' you try to get the drop on me, or make a movement to do it, you're a dead coon!"

"I'd rather be a live man than a dead coon," answered the Captain placidly. He was perfectly at his ease, but inwardly he was reproaching himself that he had not produced his own revolver first. Even as it was he would have risked a scrimmage were he not afraid that George might get shot in the *mêlée*. The latter looked over at Carton from the lounge as much as to say: "I'll do whatever you wish me to," and the Captain,

interpreting the glance, said aloud: "Keep perfectly still, George."

"And now, my friend," asked Carton of Joshua, "what do you propose to do?"

"In the first place, to shoot either of you, if you move."

"Yes; you have said that before," returned Carton. "But you can't stand there all day; you'll get so eternally tired."

In spite of himself, and of his anger against all enemies of the Southern Confederacy, Joshua Hubbard could not help admiring the pluck of his adversaries. "No," he laughed; "I don't intend to stand here all day—and I don't want to make you more uncomfortable than necessary. Pop, do you get a clothes-line and bind the arms and feet first of the boy and then of the man, and while you do it I'll send a bullet into the first fellow that makes any resistance."

The old man had been regarding this scene with a curious expression that might betoken any phase of feeling, so inscrutable was it.

"Josh, suppose you and I have an understanding right here, my son, once for all," he said, stroking his white beard as he spoke. "You are

an out-and-out Confederate—which, perhaps, is nat'ral, seein' as you have been raised here since you was a two-year old. I don't blame you, son. You've taken color from them as is around you; that's the way of the world. But you know, altho' I doan go 'round screetchin' it out to my neighbors, that I'm a Yankee out and out. I ain't sayin' that in this war the South hasn't wrongs as well as the North, but I do say as I am a New Englander, first, last and all the time, and so long as I've breath in my body I'll never lift my hand against a Union soldier, spies or no spies!"

Had the heavens fallen through the roof of the little house the two Northerners could not have been more surprised at this sudden burst of rough eloquence from the farmer. When they had found that the old man had made no exception to Joshua's proceedings they took it for granted that father and son were in accord politically. This speech was a revelation to them. Even Joshua started back in amazement. "Come, father," he said, in a tone of rebuke, "I knew you liked your old home, but I thought you cared fer the South too, and——"

"So I do," interrupted Hiram; "I like the South, but I remember where I was raised, and where your family lived for six generations, and I'm a Northerner till death. So I'm not a goin' back on the first poor devil of a Northerner who gets into hot water for servin' his country."

George could not restrain his enthusiasm. "Hurrah!" he cried; "I tell you, farmer, you're a trump!"

Joshua looked long at his father, as if he dared not trust himself to speak. There was an angry glitter in his eyes. At last he said, trying to control his voice: "Am I to understand, pop, that you refuse to help me turn these spies over to the Confederates?"

"Pop" once more stroked his beard, as if the process helped to soothe his intense feelings. "Yes," he answered, "I shan't lift a finger to harm these two. And, what's more, I don't calculate as you will, either!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Joshua. He was fast losing his temper.

"I mean that this is my house, Josh, and, as long as they are under my roof, no harm shall

come to them. I'm not as young as I was, but I'm still master of my own farm!"

"You may be master of your own farm, but the Confederate government won't let you keep spies under your roof, all the same."

"But the Confederate government knows nothin' about it, Josh."

"Humph, they soon will," returned Joshua. "I'm goin' back to the store now to send a messenger to Van Dorn's headquarters."

"Then you expect us to remain here, to be caught like two silly rabbits?" asked Carton.

"I rather think you won't get very far away," replied Joshua, as a triumphant light came into his eyes. "I see two horses in pop's barn; I reckon you and the boy escaped on 'em. Well, I shall ride one of those horses over to the store and lead the other, so that you'll have nothing to use but our old mules, and they go so confoundedly slow that it won't be long before the cavalry will nab you, go you anywhere, on the highroad or off it."

Carton laughed. "You're too bright for farming," he said, looking at Joshua.

"Thank you," answered Joshua, still keeping

his revolver in his hand ready for instant use. He backed towards the door, opened it and disappeared.

"Hurry," whispered Carton to George. "Out with our pistols! Let's run to the barn, disarm this man, even if we must shoot him down!"

Hiram Hubbard suddenly ran to the door, which he closed, and stood before it, with his arms akimbo. "Beg pardon, my friends," he said, very simply but firmly; "Josh Hubbard is my son, and while I'm for the North in this war I doan propose as any one, Northerner or Southerner, shall hurt my son. My son is—well, jest my son—and more to me, gentlemen, than North or South—than Abe Lincoln or Jeff Davis."

Carton walked over to the old farmer and shook him by the hand. "I respect you for what you have said," he announced. "And as you have stood our friend in this matter, God prevent that we should harm one hair of your son's head. Let him do what he will—go where he will—he is your son—and you have stood by us—and that is enough!"

It was a solemn scene where all questions of section, or politics, were lost sight of in the

broader question of family affection on the one side, and, on the other side, of respect for that self-same affection.

Old Hubbard advanced and put a horny hand on Carton's shoulder. "Thank you," he said, "for understanding that my son is more to me than the troubles between North and South. There he goes now," he added.

The three in the room listened eagerly. They could hear Joshua riding away, and they judged from the clatter of hoofs that he not only rode one of the spies' horses, but that he took the other with him, in leash.

The face of Farmer Hubbard now lightened; his kindly eyes seemed to gleam with hope. "Now that Josh has gone," he continued, "and that you won't fire into him, I'm at liberty to do what I kin to help you. The only thing is, brother, what kin I do?"

It must be admitted that the prospect of doing anything successfully, by way of escape, did not seem very encouraging. George was still very weak from his chill, and it was not likely that even if he were fit to ride, the mules in old Hubbard's barn could enable them to get very

far without being overtaken either by hounds or cavalry horses. Carton expressed these thoughts to the old man in a few, short sentences. "It looks as if we must be surely taken," he added, with the air of a man who has resolved to face the inevitable.

George left his sofa, and walked over to where the Captain was now standing, near the fireplace. "Count on me, whatever happens," he said courageously, but without any attempt at braggadocio.

"But I doan know as to yer bein' taken," pursued Hubbard, who had been in deep thought during the past minute or two. "I've a plan. Listen!"

The two spies were only too glad to listen to any plan that might promise them deliverance.

"It's this," explained Hubbard. "As yer can't possibly escape from here quick enough to avoid bein' snapped up by the rebels, the only thing to do is to hide."

"Hide where?" asked George, who began to feel a trifle better in mind and body.

"Right in this house," answered the farmer.

"I'm afraid your son would find us out," ob-

served Carton. "He must know this house like a book."

"Perhaps he does," said Hubbard, "but I guess as when my wife and I put our heads together we may be as smart as he is." He assumed the air of a proud peacock: it was plain that his vanity was at stake. "I'll speak to Sarah," he added, as he walked into the kitchen.

"My dear boy," said Carton, looking at George as the farmer left the room, "if we get out of this last scrape I think our lives will be insured for a thousand years."

"I really think that we shall see the Union camp again," answered George.

"I hope so," said Captain Carton. "It's either that, or——" He pointed significantly to his throat.

CHAPTER V

HOME AGAIN

In a few minutes—indeed, in three or four minutes—Hiram Hubbard returned, leading his wife. She looked smilingly upon the fugitives. It was evident that she was a Northern sympathizer.

"Me and Sarah has had a kind o' conference," he explained, "and we've come to a conclusion."

Carton and George might have said that from the yelling in which Hiram had indulged, muffled though it might be by the closed door between kitchen and "settin'-room," they were fully aware that a "conference" had been in progress. But they were too diplomatic to express their thoughts. They simply nodded an assent.

"It's jest this way," said Hiram. "Ye can't either of you, possibly get any sort of a leeway by tryin' to get away from the farm. Now that Josh has taken your two horses there's only a few spavined mules to use—and they go at the

rate of five miles an hour. The Confederates would soon catch up to you."

"I understand that thoroughly," returned the Captain. "To leave this house would be fatal."

"Well, then, I'll tell you our plan," continued Hubbard. Here Mrs. Hubbard sat down at her table and began to knit as placidly as if nothing had happened. "Yer can't hide in this settin'-room; yer can't hide in the kitchen, or in Josh's bedroom, or in our bedroom, or in the cellar, or in the attic, or in the barn, or in any of the out-houses, because Josh knows the place from A to Z, and if he comes back here with the soldiers, or is here when the soldiers come, he will pry into every nook and corner."

"Exactly," said Carton. "In other words, there's no hiding from him; eh?"

"'Cepting in one place," explained Hubbard. "What's the matter with the corn-crib?"

"The corn-crib?" asked George. "Why you can see right through a corn-crib."

"It's all in the way you git into it," said Hubbard. "My crib is about half full o' ears o' dried corn. Now if you fellows will lie down on the corn, and put some of the ears over you,

so as yer whole bodies and heads will be covered, no one will see you, and, what's more, no one will ever think of looking for you there."

Carton slapped Hubbard on the back, and then shook him warmly by the hand. "You're a genius," he cried, "and, better than that, a good friend to two unfortunates who are sadly in need of friends." Then he bowed to Mrs. Hubbard, who appeared to have some idea of what he had said. "I told him," she quavered, pointing to her husband, "that I was jest as much of a Yankee as he is, and I'd do all I could to help you."

"Hush, mother! What's that?" the voice was that of the farmer. He strained his ears; it seemed as if he heard some unwelcome sound off in the distance. He ran to the door and was soon out of the house. In a couple of minutes he returned, full of excitement. "Josh must have met some of the cavalry on the road," he cried; "they are coming up the lane. I can hear the clatter of the horses. Come! There's not a second to lose!"

Quick as a flash Carton and George followed the farmer out of the house and down to the

barn. To the right of this small structure was a crib half filled, as Hubbard had explained, with dried corn. The old man threw open the door and began to pitch the ears out upon the ground until he had thus extracted about a quarter of the contents.

"The cavalry are almost here," cried George, who was now helping the farmer in his task assisted by Carton. They could hear horses coming up the lane, and at last the sound of voices.

"Then in with you!" said Hubbard. He pushed the spies into the crib. "Lie down on the corn—flat—that way—just as if you were going to sleep." As soon as they obeyed him the farmer threw the corn ears that were on the ground back into the crib, so that the bodies of the two hiders were pretty well covered. Any one looking carelessly through the slats of the receptacle would see nothing but the corn.

"Now keep as still as you possibly can till I get rid of these fellows," commanded Hubbard; "and whatever you do be sure to stay just where you are till I tell you to come out."

He had just time to shut the door of the crib,

and move back to the portico of the house, before the pursuers arrived. They comprised four cavalrymen, well armed, and Joshua, who rode Carton's mare and led the bay.

"Well, pop," called out Joshua, as he drew up with his companions in front of the portico, "did those two fellows get away?" As he spoke he winked cautiously at his father, and the latter understood what was meant to be conveyed to him. The wink said, plainly enough: "I intend to get these spies, but I don't intend to get you into trouble by saying you are in league with them." The father had protected the son from death a few moments before; now the son was, however unconsciously, returning the compliment.

"No," replied the old man. "Them durned rascals got away—bad luck to 'em, and the last as I see of them they was running back into the country, up the lane here."

"Then we have got them sure," cried one of the horsemen. He pointed to a large hound which had accompanied him and was whining impatiently behind his horse. "This boy'll track 'em, won't you, Jupiter?"

"Jupiter" gave a significant howl, as much as

to say that he was only too anxious for a man-hunt.

"But before you begin the chase, fellows, let's ransack the house and the barn," said Joshua. "While my father's back was turned they may have run back and hidden here. They were just smart enough to do a thing like that."

Joshua felt convinced that the spies were hidden, as he suggested, either in the house or the barn, and he believed that his father knew where they could be found. But he was careful not to let the Confederates think that he suspected the old man.

"Go in and hunt, boys," said Hiram, with an alacrity and cheerfulness that rather puzzled his son. "I'll help you all I can."

"Perhaps the spies are not here, after all," thought Joshua. But he resolved to institute a hunt, under any circumstances. "Let's try the barn first," he ordered.

The men all rode over to the barn, where they dismounted and quartered their horses. Then they went through the building, searching every nook and cranny, peering into the stalls, and

even poking the hay to make sure that no one was underneath.

"No one here; that's certain," finally observed Joshua, and to this sentiment his companions agreed. So they walked out of the barn, casually inspected the sheepfold and the pig-pen, and glanced, rather mechanically than by intention, at the corn-crib. They saw the corn through the slats, and a more innocent-looking sight they could not have gazed upon. Had Joshua been in a mood to examine into the resources and supplies of the farm he might have noticed that the stock of corn had risen a foot or more since the day before, but his thoughts were in another direction.

For a minute Joshua stood almost touching the crib. It was an awful minute for the two in the corn. They realized that the slightest movement on their part, even an involuntary sigh, might catch the ear of the young man. But Joshua started back for the house, accompanied by the soldiers. He had heard nothing.

"That was a narrow escape," whispered George, when he heard the party enter the house.

"Narrow!" said Carton. "I should say so. We were within an eighth of an inch of discovery. I hope these fellows will go soon. I'm getting so stiff I feel as if I had incurable rheumatism."

"They brought a hound with them," whispered the boy.

"What?" said the Captain. "I didn't hear it over here."

"No," answered George, "but I distinctly heard it whining when the men came in the gate."

It may naturally be asked what had become of "Jupiter," and why he did not go with the hunters upon their search in the barn? The answer has to do with the shrewdness of old Hiram Hubbard. When the old man saw the dog, as the cavalrymen had first ridden up to the portico, he realized that if the animal got over to the barn he might accidentally scent the spies in the crib and thus call attention to their whereabouts. He resolved to prevent this catastrophe, at least. Two things aided him in this intention. In the first place, the men did not expect the aid of the dog in the barn; they

wanted him to track down the fugitives across country, if it turned out that they had really left the farm. In the second place, Master "Jupiter," being a dog of healthy appetite, and sniffing something cooking, stole around to the back of the kitchen whilst the soldiers were talking at the portico. Thus, the moment that the men started off for the stable, Hiram ran back to the kitchen, opened the door, enticed the dog in, and threw him half a dozen bones that promised to keep his teeth well employed for an hour. "Jupiter" forgot all about the barn, and settled down to attack his new breakfast.

When the men returned from the barn they instituted a strict search of the house, with Joshua at their head. Bedrooms, sitting-room, cellar, kitchen and a woodshed were all visited; closets were opened; nothing was left unexplored, but in vain.

"One thing's sure," said Joshua; "the rogues are not on the farm." The pursuers were all back in the sitting-room.

"Just what I told you, Josh," observed his father. "You have only been wasting precious time."

Thereat the elder Hubbard looked as if he thought he had been misjudged.

Joshua stared at his father. "I'd like to know," he thought, "whether pop is playing a part or not." But he kept his reflections to himself. He had no intention of getting the old man into trouble. The whole Confederacy might succeed or fail, but he was determined, despite his warm adherence to the cause of the South, to be a loyal son. He believed, at any rate, that the fugitives were not concealed anywhere on the farm; he thought it likely that they were trying to escape across country, just as Hiram Hubbard had announced.

"Come, boys," he said, turning to the cavalrymen; "let's run 'em down. They can't be far away from here yet. Where's your dog?" He turned and looked enquiringly at the owner of the hound.

"Why he's gnawing bones in our kitchen," explained Hiram Hubbard.

"Yes, I saw him," answered "Jupiter's" master; "he was taking a second breakfast."

"Then call him," said Joshua. He was be-

coming impatient at the delay. He was chafing to be after the spies.

"Jupiter's" master, a thick-set, sturdy young fellow, gave a long, low whistle. The hound came bustling in from the kitchen, as if he thought he had been caught in the commission of a crime.

"There'll be work for you, Jupiter," said his master. "No more breakfast."

Jupiter looked first at his owner, and then back at Mrs. Hubbard, who was now standing over the fireplace in the kitchen. It was a struggle between eating and duty—and he finally decided in favor of duty.

Joshua suddenly looked at the little table in the sitting-room, upon which his mother had left her knitting. There was on it not only the knitting, but something more—a soft, faded slouch hat, gray and dirty. "Well, I'll be durned," he cried, with an air of triumphant discovery, "if this isn't lucky. Here's the hat the older spy wore. We can use it to give Jupiter!"

The soldiers inspected the hat with expressions of approval.

"Good," said "Jupiter's" owner. "If I give

my dog that hat, and let him smell it, he'll track its wearer to the end of the earth!"

Hiram Hubbard gave an unpleasant start. It came over him, with a sickly feeling, that if "Jupiter" got the scent of the hat he would, in all human probability, track its wearer right to the corn-crib. Something must be done, and at once. But what? While he was trying to think of a solution of the difficulty, and realizing that every second's delay might mean an additional nail in the coffins of the two Northerners, Joshua said: "Give the beast a whiff of the hat, and come on. We can't let the spies get too long a start of us."

He was about to throw the slouch hat to the dog when, to the surprise of all, Hiram Hubbard suddenly intervened. He seized the hat, threw it into the fire blazing in the hearth of the sitting-room, and calmly surveyed the amazed soldiers, and the no less amazed Joshua. The flames at once consumed it until nothing was left of it save a charred bit of blackened cloth. Then the old farmer spoke. He had a part to play, and he was determined to play it well.

"Perhaps yer think it's queer in me throwin' that there hat in the fire," he said. There was a

provokingly nasal twang in his voice. It was provoking, at least, to the owner of "Jupiter," who exclaimed angrily: "By what right do you destroy something that will help us to track these spies? Are you friends of theirs? This is abominable!"

"You can call it whatsoever you like," returned Hubbard, who began to feel very bold now that the hat was fairly consumed. "I jest throwed in that hat because I doan believe in huntin' a man with a dog. Let a man hunt a man, and a dog hunt a dog, but never let a dog hunt a man. So I says."

The listeners gazed upon the farmer in perfect astonishment, and their thoughts were well echoed by "Jupiter's" master, who asked brusquely: "Are you crazy, old man?" They were not used to such philosophy as this.

"It goes ag'in my conscience," went on Hubbard. "If you want to hunt a man hunt him square, without depending on dogs!"

Joshua regarded his father attentively. "What can the old man be up to?" he thought.

The fact was that the "old man" was simply talking, as the expression goes, for "talk's sake."

He cared little or nothing whether or not a man was chased by a dog, but he had burned the hat, and he felt it incumbent on him to give some excuse, however far-fetched it might be.

"Look here," cried one of the soldiers, who had not yet spoken. "Do you know that you have put an obstacle in the way of the Confederate army, and have made yourself liable to arrest?"

"My conscience comes before any army," answered the farmer, stroking his beard with an affectation of extreme piety.

"Nonsense," went on the man. "Your conscience has nothing to do with the case."

Joshua walked forward and stood with his broad back to the fireplace. He was well aware that his father had gained a point by burning the hat—little did he understand how great a point—but he had no intention that the old man should be harmed for what he had done. "Look here, my friends," he said, in clear, ringing tones, "My pop here has acted according to his lights—and I don't propose that he'll be sassed by any of you. So take care."

Here every one began to talk at once, so that

for several minutes a sort of pandemonium reigned in the little room. Angry voices filled the air; only the voice of Hiram Hubbard remained suave, as he went on declaring that he was constitutionally opposed to the use of dogs for hunting down men. The cavalrymen shouted that by burning up the hat he had made himself an enemy to the Confederacy, whilst Joshua, whose sensations were of a rather mixed nature, protested that no one should abuse his father. He was very angry at the old man, and yet fearful that the soldiers might commit some violence upon him.

At last, realizing that they were wasting precious time, the pursuing party, including Joshua and "Jupiter," ran down to the barn, mounted their horses, and rode away in their vain search for the spies.

Hiram watched them leave the farm from a window of the sitting-room. He chuckled as he said: "I had to invent some excuse for burning that there hat. I hope it won't git me into a Confederate jail, though. Pshaw!" He opened the door, walked out on the portico, and listened. The sound of the men scampering up

the muddy lane gradually grew fainter and fainter. He stepped off the portico and was about to hurry over to the barn when he changed his mind and walked slowly out to the gateway of the farm. "Yer can't be too keerful," he said to himself, gazing carefully up the lane. "One of those fellows might have come sneaking back." But no one was in sight. Then he looked at the sky. The sun was shining brightly and the air was so soft and balmy that it was hard to understand that winter had not passed away. "It will be clear to-night, and a good moon by to-morrow night," he said, "but it can't be helped." With that enigmatical remark he turned from the gate, walked quickly over to the barn, and thence to the corn-crib. "Out with you, boys," he cried, as he opened the door. "The soldiers have rid off, and ye're to have a little breathing spell."

What welcome news this was to George and Carton. They had become cramped almost beyond endurance among the ears of corn, so that when they received Hiram's order they jumped up, and out of the crib, with as much alacrity as their stiffened joints would permit. George,

who had held his battered straw hat in his hand during their incarceration in the corn, now thrust it upon his head.

"By Jove, I left my hat in the house," said the bareheaded Captain. He had forgotten all about it.

"Ye—es," replied the farmer grimly, "and it came plaguy close to gettin' you somewhere where you'd never need a hat again." Thereupon he told the spies, very briefly, what had occurred in the house. They began to pour out their thanks to the kind-hearted Yankee, but he cut them short. "There ain't no time fer gratitude," he said. "I must git ye both in the barn."

He hurried them into the stable and up to the hayloft, where he told them how he hoped to send them in safety on their way to Murfreesboro, for they frankly divulged to him where they came from, and the nature of their mission. His plan was thus outlined. The spies were to remain in the loft—a part of the stable which Joshua had not penetrated—until the following night, and the farmer would contrive to provide them secretly with food. This would allow George plenty of time to rest from the effects of

his ague, and also would afford needed rest to the black mare upon which Joshua was now riding in his vain search for the fugitives. The bay horse was now down-stairs, in one of the mule stalls. When about eleven o'clock of the following evening arrived George and Carton were to mount these horses, ride quietly out of the barn, so as not to awaken the son, and then make a great dash for Murfreesboro and liberty. "I'm sorry to-morrow will be moonlight," added Hiram. "It would be better if yer could git away in the dark."

"But on the other hand," said Carton, "we can see the road better."

The farmer now left the barn but soon returned bearing a large basket that contained a miscellaneous, yet very welcome collection of articles. He placed them on the floor of the loft and disclosed cold sausages, some ham, hard boiled eggs, salt in a piece of newspaper, cold potatoes, a pot of hominy, a demijohn of water, two knives (forks were not included), some quinine for George, and two large, tattered books. The latter were "The Plays of William Shakespeare," and Young's "Night Thoughts."

"Thought you boys might want books to read while ye're hidin'," explained Hiram, "and them's the only two books I own 'cept a book on farmin', written, I'll bet, by a man who never seen within forty miles of a farm."

George and Carton felt like hugging the farmer, and would have done so, no doubt, had not the old man showed himself greatly embarrassed at their evident gratitude. "I'll be back here to-morrow sometime, when Josh goes to the store," he said, "and meantime you two keep quiet as moles ef yer hear any one around the barn." The next minute he had disappeared. But he called back softly, when he reached the bottom of the ladder leading to the loft: "They say those theatre-plays of William Shakespeare are wuth readin', though there's no telling. Books is mighty deceitful."

"This is slightly more comfortable than the other stable we were in this morning," laughed Carton a few minutes later, as he took a long, refreshing pull at the water jug.

"We have a different sort of a host—God bless him," answered George.

The two talked in whispers, read, or helped

themselves to food, until about four o'clock in the afternoon. Then they heard the soft thud of a horse's hoofs, coming into the farm, and swiftly down to the barn. The rider dismounted, flung open the door of the latter, and led the animal inside. They easily guessed that it was the disappointed Joshua returning with the black mare.

Hardly had Joshua unsaddled the mare, and put her in a stall, before his father walked into the barn.

"Well, Josh," the hiders in the loft heard him say, "what luck?"

"No luck, darn it," answered the son. "I'd like to know how you got those fellows off so cleverly. Won't you tell me, pop?"

"Yes, I'll tell you," said the farmer.

"Well?" asked Joshua eagerly.

"I'll tell you after this here Civil War is over," returned the old man.

Joshua uttered an exclamation more forcible than polite.

"Come, my boy," said Hiram, in a more kindly tone, "you're fer the South in this wretched quarrel, and I'm fer the North, but we are father

and son, and there ain't no use in our quarreling, too."

"You're right," replied Joshua, after a pause. "You're my father first, and a Yankee afterwards. I think I showed you when those cavalrymen were here to-day that I wouldn't let them harm a hair of your old head. They have gone back to Van Dorn's camp howling mad at not finding the spies. They were howling mad at you, too, but I fixed that all right."

"How did yer do it, Josh?"

"Told 'em you were a little daft—crazy, and that you had all sorts o' 'luny' ideas about dogs!"

"Good," laughed Hiram. In several more minutes the father and son left the barn, evidently on very good terms with each other. Family affection had the higher claim.

* * * * * *

We will now cover, in a second, more than twenty-four hours of time, and ask our readers to peer into the Hubbard barn the following evening, at about eleven o'clock. They may see, through the pale moonlight that pours into the hayloft

through an open window, that George and Carton are cautiously descending the ladder. They have seen Hiram once during the day; he has brought them more food, given them their final instructions, and has taken farewell of them after a hundred expressions of fervent thanks from the Northerners.

"It's dark as pitch down here," whispered Carton, as he reached the bottom of the ladder. The ground floor of the barn was, indeed, without a ray of light, as the windows, or rather the shutters, were tightly closed, and the moonshine which illumined the loft was conspicuous by its absence. George, who was already on the ground, was groping about for the stalls. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry; there was a squeal from a mule; a horse began to neigh, and every animal in the place seemed to be kicking simultaneously.

"What on earth's the matter?" demanded the Captain.

"I thought I was in the bay's stall," explained the boy, "and I got into one of these plaguy mule's, by mistake, and frightened the old ninny."

"Hope it won't wake up Joshua," muttered Carton. "Shut up, you fools," he added sav-

agely, addressing the mules, who, thoroughly alarmed by the unexpected descent of the spies, were indulging in a succession of exasperating cries.

George bit his lip in sheer vexation. Would the three inmates of the Hubbard farmhouse be aroused, and would Joshua think there were men in the barn?

The two fugitives made their way carefully along the stalls, speaking to the animals in soothing tones. At last they succeeded in reassuring the mules; their squealing ceased, and all was quiet. George got into the stall where the bay was standing and patted the creature, while Carton took the same precaution with the black mare. Then they crept cautiously to the door of the barn and listened. No sound, save the hooting of an owl, came from the outside.

"I can't hear anything," whispered Carton. "I guess the noise didn't wake them up, after all."

"Listen!" said the boy.

There was dead silence for a moment, and then Carton asked: "Did you hear anything? I did not."

"I thought I heard a faint sound—the sound of a door clicking."

They waited for fully ten minutes, with ears pressed against the door, but no sound, save the owl, and once the barking of a distant dog, disturbed the stillness of the night.

"It must have been my imagination," said George at last.

"Yes," answered his companion; "if the noise had awakened them at the house either Joshua or his father would have been over here by this time. But let's wait a few minutes more; it will be safer. Then we will be perfectly sure."

Nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed when Carton said: "Now for it, my boy. The coast is perfectly clear now. And before this time to-morrow may we be telling our adventures to Rosecrans and Thomas."

Although the time was now ripe for departure, it proved by no means easy to make ready the bay and the black mare. Hiram Hubbard had told the Northerners where the hooks were on which the harness was always kept, and it was to these hooks, in the back part of the stable, that they stumbled their way in order to find the

saddles and bridles of the stolen cavalry horses. When they reached these hooks, after some trouble, and fearful that they might again alarm the stupid mules by their stealthy movements, they had considerable difficulty in finding their bridles in the darkness, amid the bewildering array of straps, reins, harness, and other things, used by the farmer. Finally they obtained what they wanted, led the horses from their stalls, and saddled them, as best they could, under such disadvantages. Then Carton led his mare back into her stall, and hitched her there.

"What are you doing that for?" asked the boy.

"Because, before we begin our long journey we had better take a glimpse outside the barn, to make perfectly sure no one is about. Put the bay back in his stall for a second. Then we'll come back, mount, and be off."

George obeyed this direction. Then Carton slowly opened the door. A rich flood of moonlight burst into the barn, almost blinding them for a moment. The night was beautiful; the air was still balmy; all nature seemed full of peace and gentleness.

"The time has come," said Carton, almost solemnly. With two swift horses, a clear night, and no one stirring, they seemed so near deliverance from their enemies. Yet who could tell what might happen between here and the camp at Murfreesboro.

"You are ready for a fast ride?" he asked of George, "and you feel all right again? No more ague?"

"I feel like a fighting cock," murmured George. He longed to be on the bay and away.

"Then let's be off," said Carton. They were about to step back to the barn when a stalwart figure suddenly leaped from behind the corn-crib and ran forward to them. It was Joshua Hubbard!

He held in his right hand a revolver which he flourished in the faces of the Northerners. "So I've got you rascals at last, have I?" he panted. "I heard a noise in the barn, sneaked out of the house, crawled down here, listened, knew there was some one inside, and waited. But I didn't expect to be so lucky as this!"

Carton eyed the farmer's son without any dis-

may. "I suppose you think you have got the drop on us again?" he said.

"Yes, once again," snarled Joshua. His eyes gleamed with the ferocity of a wild animal which has at length tracked a long-sought victim.

"Not yet!" cried Carton. As he spoke, quick as lightning, he put down his head, made a rush, and fairly butted himself into Joshua's legs. His adversary, completely taken by surprise by the rapidity and the ingenuity of the movement, lost his balance, lurched heavily forward, and sprawled with his face upon the ground.

"Quick!" shouted Carton. He threw himself on the prostrate Joshua, wrenched the revolver from his hand, threw it to George, who skilfully caught it, and then grabbed the farmer's son by the throat. "If you dare to move, or try to get up," he cried, "the boy here will fire that pistol straight into you!"

Joshua made a motion, faint though it might be, that signified submission, and the Captain relaxed the grasp upon his throat, and stood up. George kept the revolver pointed upon their enemy.

"Look here, Hubbard," said Carton, looking down at the farmer in a not unkindly fashion, yet with a determined expression on his strong face; "we don't propose to harm a hair of your head, if you behave like a sensible man. We haven't any quarrel with you; you're acting up to your own lights as a Confederate. But we are going to ride away from here, and make a dash for our camp at Murfreesboro. Do you understand?"

"It's as plain as the nose on my face," growled Joshua, who did not relish his present recumbent position. "You want to escape the hanging you deserve!"

Carton laughed. "Exactly," he answered. "No one in this world wants to get what he really deserves. And so, George, I'll ask you to go into the barn, feel around till you get to the harness hooks, and bring out a few leather straps that will do to bind up Mr. Hubbard with. We'll tie his hands and feet and let him repose in the barn until his father comes to the rescue. Hand me the pistol."

George turned over the revolver to Carton who pointed it in the face of Joshua, and disap-

peared into the barn. Joshua uttered, under his breath, what must have been an oath.

"We are not going to do you any injury," said the Captain, in a reassuring tone.

"Pooh!" snarled Joshua, than whom there was no more courageous man in all Tennessee, "d'ye think I'm frightened?"

Carton drew himself up. "Not a bit," he explained. "You're no coward! That's plain. I only wanted to say that no harm should come from us to the son of Hiram Hubbard, be he Confederate or Northerner."

The moonlight shining on the upturned face of Joshua Hubbard showed a grim twinkle in his eyes. "I'd like to make a good rebel of pop," he said, between his set teeth.

George now returned from the barn with leather straps taken from the harness hooks. These he proceeded to use in tying first the hands and then the feet of Joshua, whilst Carton held the pistol poised warningly over the head of the disgusted Tennessean.

"Good-bye, my friend," said Carton. "It's a pleasant night and you can't come to any harm lying out here until your father turns up. Give

him our regards—and tell him we shall never, never forget his kindness, and his loyalty to the cause of the Yankees." He went back into the barn as he spoke, followed by George. The two soon reappeared leading their horses, which they immediately mounted.

"Come on, George," commanded Carton. He waved his hand at Joshua, flat upon the ground, and galloped away from the barn, with the boy close behind him. The two passed the farm-house, and were soon running along the lane. At the end of a mile they reached the highroad, and then began their dash for Murfreesboro.

They galloped along for a couple of miles without speaking a word. At last they drew in their horses, and put them on a walk. The moon shone high in the heavens; the country all about them looked desolate and deserted.

"We are out of danger," cried Carton. His spirits had risen gradually as he put distance between himself and the Hubbard farm.

"Look!" said George. He pointed to a spot upon the road about a quarter of a mile in front of them. Then they saw, riding slowly towards them, two horsemen in military uniform.

"What shall we do?" asked George.

"Let's gallop past them," said the Captain. "We'll take no more risks! Have you got your revolver?"

By way of answer George took his pistol from under his shirt and showed it to Carton. The latter, following his example, pulled out his own revolver from a similar receptacle, and flourished it in the moonlight. They were coming nearer to the horsemen.

"Run right by them!" commanded Carton. "It's now or never—Murfreesboro to-morrow morning, or not at all."

They put their horses once more into a gallop, and were soon upon the two strangers.

"Halt!" cried one of the mysterious horsemen. "Halt, in the name of the Confederacy!"

"On, on!" shouted Carton. He and George attempted to pass the Confederates, for such they undoubtedly were, but the latter stopped their way in the middle of the road. George could see that one was a cavalryman who had taken a chicken from their wagon at Spring Hill. The man suddenly recognized the two spies.

"Halloa!" he cried. "Just the fellows we've been looking for!"

"Get out of our way!" shouted Carton. His mare, and George's bay, had come to a sudden standstill.

"Not a bit of it!" answered the Confederate. He and his companion were both mounted on white horses, which looked like weird ghosts in the moonlight.

But Carton did not wait to see or hear more. "Out of my way!" he shouted. And aiming his pistol at the man he fired. There was a loud report, and the Confederate, wounded in the right arm, let go the hold of his horse's rein. The animal, thoroughly frightened, started to run and would have bolted with his rider had not the other Confederate come to the assistance of his fellow and seized the horse by the bridle.

In the confusion Carton and George galloped past them and were soon out of harm's way.

"Are they following us?" asked the Captain, after they had traversed half a mile or more.

George looked behind him. A bend in the road hid the two enemies from sight, but there was no sign that they were pursuing.

"Now for it," said Carton. "On to camp, and hurrah for Rosecrans and Thomas!"

On they sped. Past farmhouses, negro cabins and hamlets they ran, with here and there a space of breathing time for the faithful mare and the energetic bay, until the first streaks of dawn began to appear above the eastern horizon.

Some hours later the two fugitives, who were fugitives no longer, were standing before Generals Rosecrans and Thomas in the same room in which all four characters were first introduced to us in the first chapter of this story.

General Rosecrans was shaking hands with Carton. "You have brought me most valuable information about the camp at Spring Hill," he said enthusiastically, "and I can never thank you and your friend here, George Knight, enough for what you have done. I shall recommend you, Captain, for a promotion to a Lieutenant-Colonelcy."

"And I," exclaimed General Thomas, regarding George with admiring eyes, "shall write a full account of this boy's bravery to President Lincoln and the Secretary of War. I am proud that the lad is a member of my staff."

Thus it came about that Captain Carton soon became the Lieutenant-Colonel of an Indiana regiment of volunteers and George Knight was brevetted a first Lieutenant in the army for "Meritorious services," by special appointment of Abraham Lincoln.

As Hiram Hubbard and his son Joshua are not to appear in this story again it may be well to describe their future careers. Joshua, who was released from his uncomfortable position in front of the barn, several hours after the departure of the spies, by the opportune aid of his father, is now a prosperous merchant in Nashville. He has become a warm adherent of the Union, and looks back at his adventure with the two men from the Murfreesboro camp with amusement rather than anger. Hiram Hubbard has been dead for more than twenty years. During the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, in 1876, George Knight, then a grown man, met the old farmer, and it was his privilege to do more than one kindness for his "Yankee" friend. Indeed, we are not violating a secret if we say that Hiram Hubbard, during the two months he spent in the Quaker City at that time, was the guest, at a

well-known hotel, of George Knight. "I like Philadelphia," said Hiram; "it's so near New England."

CHAPTER VI

"GUERRILLAS" AT SHORT RANGE

ABOUT two weeks after the occurrences narrated in the last chapter George Knight might have been found hard at work in the office at General Thomas's headquarters. He was copying a number of letters and leaning over a desk as if his life depended upon the speedy execution of the task.

At last he lifted up his head, with a sigh of relief. "That's done," he said to himself; "now to my other work."

Here the door opened and General Thomas entered the room. His stern, thoughtful face relaxed into a smile as he looked at the boy. "George, you have been at that desk since nine o'clock this morning, and it's now two o'clock. Haven't you had any dinner?"

"Yes, General," answered the boy; "an orderly brought me something to eat an hour ago."

"Aren't you through work yet?" asked the General.

"No; I must copy out the minutes of that Robinson court-martial."

"Oh, let that go until to-morrow. Too much work makes Jack a dull boy. Go out of the house for a while and get some fresh air."

The lad rose from his desk with alacrity. He was dressed in the new uniform of a first lieutenant, which he had put on that day for the first time, and he had never presented a better figure, or looked handsomer. He had recovered entirely from his attack of ague, thanks to judicious doses of quinine, and now seemed the picture of health.

"Very well, General," he said; "I can't resist those orders."

Thomas laughed. "That's right," he answered, "A true soldier always obeys orders."

George left the office, put on a new blue overcoat which was hanging up in the hallway of the house, and was soon out in the open air. It was, in truth, a day in which one should be out rather than within doors. The sun was shining brightly; the air was bracing, and everything breathed of energy. The little town, swarming with soldiers,

the fortifications encircling it, and the several tented camps in the vicinity, made the scene one not easily to be forgotten.

George turned a corner in order to get in the principal street of the town, and in doing so ran directly into the arms of an advancing private. The man and the boy drew away, looked at each other, and then each burst into laughter.

"And it's you?" said George. "You're just the man I want to see."

The private was a tall, jolly-faced fellow who looked as if he enjoyed the world, whether in peace or war. He was carrying in one hand a pair of skates, and in the other a long stick.

"Well, master Leftenant, I see you have on my new overcoat," he cried.

"Yes, and your new suit, too," answered the boy, unbuttoning his overcoat and giving the soldier a glimpse of the pretty uniform underneath. "General Thomas says you're such a good fitter that you should keep a tailor shop on Broadway, New York."

The man flushed with pleasure. He had formerly worked in a tailor's shop in Philadelphia, while now that he was an enlisted soldier he was

allowed, on rare occasions, to make a uniform for an officer who happened to be in a hurry for the clothes.

"Those togs do look well, even if I do say it, as I shouldn't," he said, "and you look like a general in them yourself."

George was rather flattered, secretly, by this compliment, but he only answered: "Nonsense!" Then he added: "What are you doing with those skates?"

"I've been skating over at a big pond in Marple's woods. Three of us got a morning's leave."

"And where's that?"

"Just a mile east of the town." And the soldier described just where the woods were situated.

Skating! The very thought of it made the youthful blood tingle in George's veins. How he had loved the sport up in Ohio. And to think that he had never been on the ice since he entered the army. He had the whole afternoon free, too. The General would not expect him back until supper time.

The result of all this thinking was that in another half hour George had reached Marple's Woods, with the skates borrowed from the

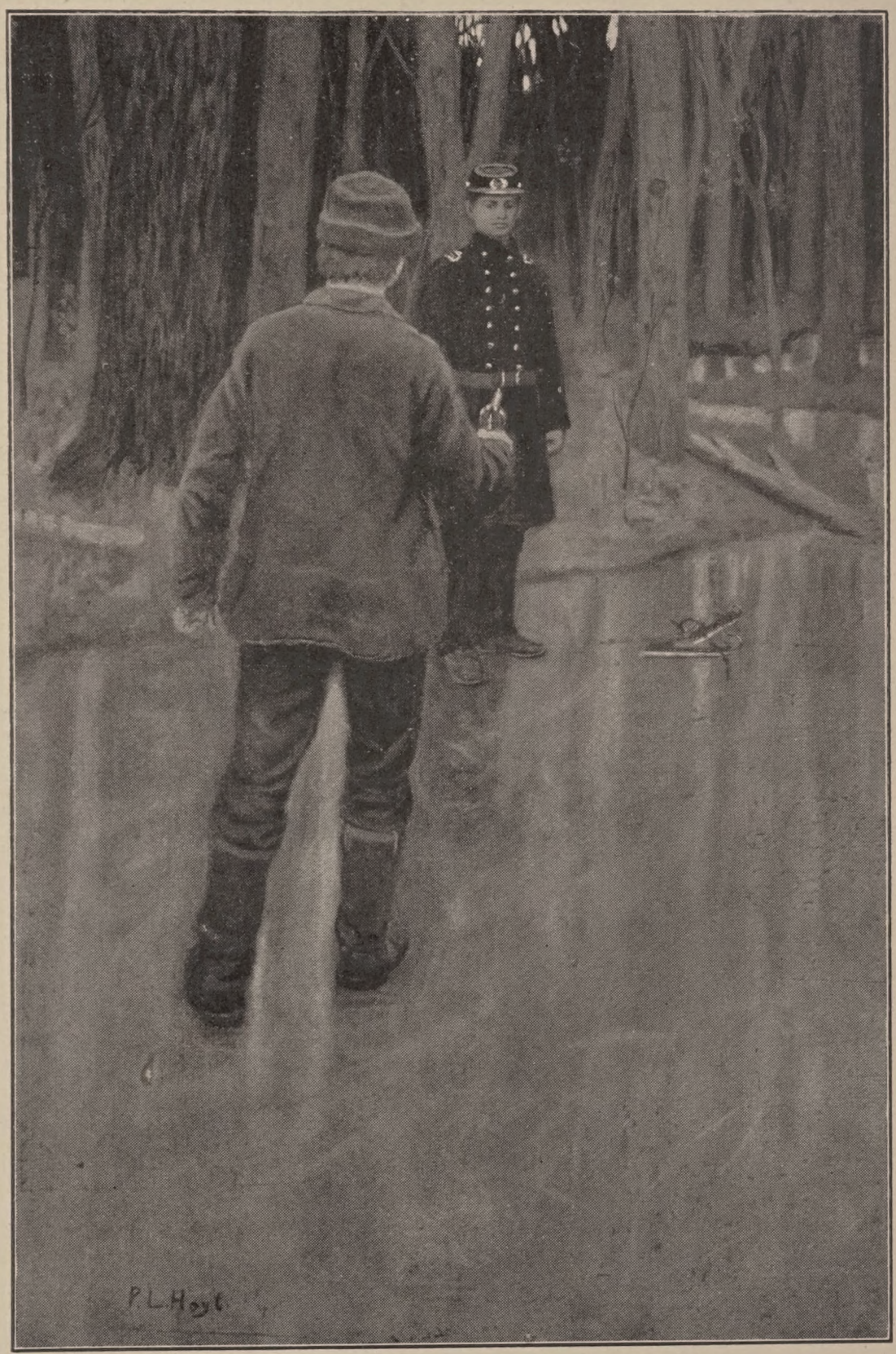
tailor-soldier. For another half hour thereafter he enjoyed himself by skimming along the ice, making figures and letters, waltzing, and cutting all sorts of athletic capers.

"I haven't had such fun in a year," he gasped at length, when he was thoroughly tired out. He went to the edge of the pond, sat down, and unstrapped the skates from his shoes.

"Well, my buck, I reckon you like skating."

George, startled at the sound of an unexpected voice, looked up hastily. Standing on the opposite bank of the pond, at the edge of the wood which encircled the ice, was a wiry, lithe-looking man of middle age, whose distinguishing marks included a long gray goatee, a pale complexion, and a nose that resembled the beak of an American eagle. He was dressed in rough civilian's clothes, but there were pistols at his belt, and upon his head was a cap of Confederate gray. The boy knew instinctively that he was facing an enemy. He dropped his skates, rose to his feet, and felt for his revolver under his half-opened overcoat.

"Drop that!" cried the newcomer, taking a pistol from his own belt and leveling it at



"I've Got a Mortgage on Pistol Practice Around Here"

George, as he advanced across the ice towards the lad. "I've got a mortgage on pistol practice around here."

Realizing that prudence was the better part of valor, under the circumstances, George wisely let his hand fall from his belt. "What do you want with me?" he demanded.

By this time the man was within five feet of George. Here he halted. "What do I want with you?" he repeated, in a mocking tone. The boy now saw that the man had a cast in his left eye, and that his general expression was sarcastic and malevolent in the extreme. "I'd very much like to know who you are," he added, in a voice half plausible, half threatening.

"I'm an aide on the staff of Gen. George H. Thomas, of the Army of the Cumberland," cried George, not without a thrill of pardonable pride, "and I'll have you understand that I'm almost within call of men on our fortifications, and so you had better keep a civil tongue in your head."

"*Almost* within call of your men," said the man, still with that provokingly mocking air. "There's the point. You're *almost* within call,

but still not within call. So you are perfectly helpless! D'ye see the point, my infant?"

George fairly "gnashed his teeth," as the old-fashioned novelist would say, in "impotent rage." Was there ever anything so provoking? Perhaps, if he had had time to analyze his feelings, he would have confessed that the expression "my infant" grated more upon him than anything else. He had gone through so many adventures, and seen so much of the world, for one of his few years, that he had come to look upon himself, not unnaturally, as a full-grown man.

The stranger went on: "As you say you're an aide on the staff of General Thomas, I think you are just the sort of fellow we're looking for." He whistled three times, in a tone more loud than melodious. Before a minute had elapsed there bounded upon the pond, five other men, all roughly clad, without uniforms, but well-armed with pistols. Two of the men carried muskets in addition; all had hard, determined faces, and suggested free-booters rather than soldiers, either Union or Confederate. They seemed suddenly to appear from the woods, like spirits, and as they surrounded the man who had thus signaled

to them the scene they presented was uncanny in the extreme.

"Here's a find," explained the whistler, quietly, much as if he were exhibiting a prize pig at a country show. "He's an aide to Gen. George Thomas."

"Good for you, Dave," cried a fat man with a large waist. "This is just the kind o' find we want."

George saw, only too well, that he had run into a gang of men who, for some mysterious reason, intended to detain him. Without waiting for any further deliberation he turned his face towards Murfreesboro, and started to run through the woods.

There was a sharp report. A shot sped by George's left ear, almost touching it. Still the boy ran. He was desperate; his one idea was to get to a Union outpost, a quarter of a mile away. But there came one, two, three more reports. Two bullets passed several inches over his head; the third buried itself in his right leg, just above the knee.

George kept on for a few seconds. He knew that he had been wounded, but he saw the edge

of the woods in front of him; soon, if he did not flinch, he would be able to reach the outpost.

But alas! A numbness began to creep over his leg, and then came a sudden faintness from loss of blood. In another minute he was lying on the ground, between the trees, and his captors were standing over him.

"That was my shot that brought you down, sonny," said the fat man, with an evident tinge of pride. "I aimed for your leg—and I pinched you just in the right place."

"You will all suffer for this!" cried George, who resolved to put as bold a front as he could on the affair, in spite of his disabled leg.

"Oh, will we, sonny?" asked Dave, the man who had first discovered the boy. "We'll see about that."

"You are a brave lot of men," said the lad angrily. "All of you after *me*. You deserve medals—leather medals!"

"Here, no impudence, you young cub," commanded the fat man. "I'll tame your spirit before we get through with you." He turned to his companions, as he added: "Come, let's be

off with this boy. We are too near the outposts. Two of you pick him up."

Dave and one of the other men contrived to lift up George in such a way that the boy's wounded leg was not unnecessarily disturbed. Then the whole party retraced their steps through the woods until they came out at the other end, to the eastwards. There, at one side of an abandoned, ramshackle negro shanty, were tethered six bony but fleet-looking horses.

"Put the boy on your horse, Dave," ordered the fat man, who was unmistakably the person in authority. "We'll do something for his leg when we get him to the house."

"When they get me to the house," thought George. "What house?" And he wondered anew what manner of men were these that seemed to be neither of the Northern nor Southern army. Two of the men looked like Southerners, but the others, including Dave and the fat man, rather suggested Westerners.

Dave hoisted the wounded lad on his horse, with the aid of a companion, and then vaulted on to the saddle himself, in such a way that George was directly in front of him.

"He ought to be searched," said the fat man. He walked forward and drew from George's belt his much-prized revolver.

"That's a nice new suit of clothes you've got on, sonny," he added, gazing in admiring fashion at the Union uniform which revealed itself from under the unbuttoned overcoat. "I'm sorry it's too small for me; I'd like to get into it myself."

George felt tempted to say something to his captor on the subject of stealing, but he was wise enough to hold his tongue.

Within several minutes the men were all riding away from the cabin. They cut through several fields, until they struck a lonely-looking lane, which they proceeded to follow in an easterly direction. Along this they jogged, at a brisk pace, for several miles until they reached some dense woods. George began to suffer intensely from his leg; the numbness, which had disappeared, was succeeded by a throbbing, feverish pain. The flow of blood had stopped.

The cavalcade now skirted along the woods for several hundred yards until they reached a narrow bridle-path. Here they put their horses into

single file, and began a walk along the path through the cottonwood trees. Save for the sound of the hoofs upon the muddy ground there was dead silence; no one spoke a word; the fat man led the party with a stolid expression upon his large face.

"What can they be going to do with me?" thought George, between his paroxysms of pain. But he knew that there would be no answer to his question, even if he asked it audibly, until they reached their destination, whatever that might be.

In about ten minutes they came to the end of the cottonwood forest and emerged into an open plain. Across this plain the men galloped their horses, and finally reached another wood, wherein cedar trees were so densely surrounded by underbrush of every description, and clogged by grape-vines, that the place seemed absolutely impossible of access. But here, too, was a path into which the mysterious horsemen plunged. In about five minutes they reached a small clearing, which was almost altogether taken up by a very old brick house that must have been built long ago, when this part of the country was

practically a wilderness. The structure was of two stories, with an attic, and the large doorway was flanked on either side by two windows. The exterior bore unmistakable signs of decay, but it was evident that in its day the house had been the abode of people of consequence—perhaps before the woods surrounding it became as wild and tangled as they now appeared.

When they reached the front door Dave dismounted and lifted George from the horse.

"Can you stand?" asked Dave gruffly.

By way of answer the boy hobbled painfully up the three steps that led to the door, and waited at the threshold. Dave turned his horse over to the fat man and said: "Go on to the stable. I'll look after the prisoner." The others cantered to the back of the house, where the stable was evidently situated, and soon appeared again on foot.

By this time a huge negress, of sullen aspect, had opened the door. The party entered the house, and George, who was assisted by Dave, found himself in a wide hallway, partially paneled in wood, that might once have been covered

with white paint but which now showed only a few traces of the latter.

"Get us some supper, Chloe," growled the fat man, speaking to the negress pretty much as he might have spoken to his cattle.

Chloe made no answer, save by a surly nod of her ebony head, but waddled into a room in the rear of the house, probably the kitchen.

"That nigger's got a sweet temper," snarled one of the men.

"Good cooks always have," laughed Dave. It was not a pleasant laugh to hear, by the way.

All the men excepting the fat man filed into a front room on the left of the hallway. George could see that it was poorly furnished with a sofa and some chairs, and a rag carpet, but that a bright wood-fire was burning on the old-fashioned hearth.

"Come up-stairs with me," said the fat man.

George saw that he was defenseless, for the present at least, and so made no objection. He started to walk up the wide stairs at the back of the hallway, but his captor suddenly took the

boy up in his arms and thus carried him to the second floor, and thence to a front room on the left.

"You couldn't walk up-stairs with that game leg of yours," explained the fat man in a tone that had suddenly changed so that it almost approached kindliness. As he spoke he put George down upon a bed, and then, walking over to a table near the window, he lighted a kerosene lamp. It was now beginning to get dark.

George saw that he was in an uncarpeted room, with dingy walls, the furniture comprising the bed upon which he sat, a common bureau, a table, a washstand, and one lonely chair. The walls were bare, save for an old print representing "Franklin at the Court of France." At one end of the room was an open fireplace, and near it a pile of wood.

"It's cold here," the fat man said. He placed some logs on the andirons of the hearth, and soon had a bright fire burning, through the judicious use of matches and paper.

"Would you mind telling me, my dear sir," asked George, with a sarcastic inflection of the voice, "why I have been brought here? You

seem to attach remarkable importance to a young lieutenant."

The fat man came over to the bedside, and looked searchingly at his captive. George noted that his face was bloated, as if with past dissipations, and that it would have been handsome were it not for its unnatural heaviness of expression. His features were regular, but his mouth, free of any moustache, gave unmistakable signs of weakness of disposition. It was the mouth of one who might readily take to wrong courses more from lack of character than from any criminal intent.

"You're a plucky boy," he said at last. "I see you are not to be frightened."

"That is not answering my question," replied George.

"To begin with," continued the fat man, "I have brought you to this room so that I can probe for the bullet in your leg, and afterwards dress your wound. After that operation is over I may satisfy your curiosity still further."

"You probe for the ball?" cried George.

"Yes, don't worry; I'm no quack. I was a physician out in Iowa ten years ago, and if

I hadn't gotten into a scrape out there, prescribed the wrong medicine for a man when I was under the influence—never mind—I would be there yet."

There was something so refreshingly and peculiarly frank about the fellow's admission that George could not help laughing, despite the uncertainty of his own fate and the character of his surroundings.

"I hope you are sober now," he remarked.

"Never fear," answered the fat man. He walked to the bureau, and drew from a drawer a case of surgical instruments. "I am going to hurt you a little," he went on, "but I can see that you are brave enough to stand pain."

"Fire away!" commanded George. Thereupon the ex-physician did "fire away," with the result that he had soon extracted the bullet and dressed the wound, which proved to be anything but dangerous. The pain, too, soon ceased.

"You stood that like a hero," said the fat man, as he replaced the surgical instruments in the bureau.

"I wish you would pay me fewer compliments

and give me more information," rejoined George, with some asperity. He burned to know, very naturally, why he had been kidnapped and brought to this gloomy mansion.

"If I had a son, I'd like to have one just like you," said the man, in evident admiration. "You certainly have pluck. Well, I don't mind enlightening you a little bit, for there's no use in deceiving you. But before I do, I'm going down-stairs for supper. You lie quietly on the bed, and Chloe will bring yours up to you."

The next minute the fat man had departed down-stairs. Before he left the room, he said, eyeing George very searchingly: "You are not in any condition to escape with your bad leg. But I feel it my duty to warn you, my boy, that if you make any attempt to get out of this house my men will shoot you down like a dog."

"All right," replied George. He felt very weak; he had no intention of attempting to escape until his wound had healed. Then,—but that would be another matter.

After the fat man had gone, George tossed upon the bed, and thought of General Thomas, and all the friends he had left behind him in the

camp at Murfreesboro. Was the General already wondering why he had not returned to headquarters? What would the staff think when morning came and he had not appeared? As these ideas were surging through his brain the negress knocked at the door, and came shuffling into the room without waiting for the customary "come in" which George did not have time to say. She bore in her black hands a tray with a spoon, a knife, a bowl of soup, a plate of bread and butter, and a cup of steaming coffee. The boy's spirits rose at the sight. He was beginning to feel ravenous.

Chloe placed the tray on the bed; George began to devour the supper with avidity.

The face of the negress wore a new expression as she looked at the lad; there was something so sympathetic and human in her eyes, and her mouth relaxed into so great a smile, that it was hard to identify her as the same woman who had received the party at the front door.

"D'ye think ye'll be gwine wantin' any more supper, honey?" she asked. "'Cause I'll get ye more, if ye want it."

"No, thank you," said George, as he finished

the cup of coffee, which was excellent, and turned his attention to the bowl of fragrant soup. "You have brought me a feast here that's good enough for a king. That coffee was the best I have ever tasted."

Chloe showed her white teeth in delight; her dusky visage gleamed with pride. "Old Chloe allus did know how to cook coffee," she answered. "There's no one in all the South as can make coffee an' hot cakes better'n old Chloe can."

"And this soup is grand!" exclaimed George. The soup was, undoubtedly, admirably concocted. But it was not merely his appreciation of it that made the boy speak thus. It had suddenly come over him that if he flattered the negress he might be able to extract from her some valuable information as to the persons who had captured him.

"Try de bread," said Chloe, very much pleased. "It ain't many niggers, honey, as can make good white bread like mine."

The captive ate a piece of the bread, which he well plastered with butter. "That bread is the best I ever tasted," said George. The statement

might be a slight exaggeration, but he was determined to be flattering. "Even in the North we don't get bread like this very often."

"I knowed ye was a Northerner, deary, from yere blue clothes," cried Chloe. "Tell me, did yer ever see Pres'dent Lincoln?"

"I saw him once, Chloe, and I shall never forget his kind, ugly face. He's a great friend of the colored race."

"Glory, glory, hallelujah!" ejaculated Chloe. "To think as you seed Massa Lincoln! Glory!" She beat her hands upon her capacious chest, and regarded George as if he were a hero of heroes.

"Now is my time," thought the boy. And he said: "Chloe, what are you doing here, keeping house for these vagabonds?"

"Lawd a mercy," she replied, as she showed the whites of her eyes, "and does you think I wants to flutter roun' these yere thieves? But they pays me extra well—and I've relations to support."

"Then they are thieves?" went on George. "I thought they might be Confederate guerrillas."

"Confederates?" said the woman. "Con-

federates is honest. These are robbers—plain robbers!"

George now began, cautiously and gradually, to draw her out. She revealed some interesting, not to saying exciting, facts. The six men downstairs, headed by the fat man, whose name was Kearfoot, had been banded together since the opening of the Civil War, and for the past six months they had made their headquarters in this decaying house, once the home of a wealthy Tennessee pioneer. They were adventurers from different parts of the United States, while it appeared that Kearfoot, according to common report, had once been a prosperous physician in Iowa, but had taken to drinking, and lost all his practice. The men were nothing more or less than desperadoes who, taking advantage of the confusion caused by the war, roamed through parts of Tennessee robbing farmers, "holding up" travelers on the road, occasionally breaking into a village bank or post-office, and generally securing as much money as six utterly unscrupulous but clever men might. During the past month, as Chloe explained, they had been in rather hard luck, and had been hovering on the

outskirts of the Federal and Confederate armies, in the vain hope of surprising parties who might be conveying money to either camp. No money, however, had come their way, and the men were becoming desperate.

"An' now, honey, they've gwine an' stolen you!" moaned Chloe.

"What can they want with me?" asked George. "I've been trying to figure that out ever since I got into this melancholy house."

"I doan know no wise, massa," said the negress. "It passes all my understandin'. But I must be movin', honey. The men have eaten supper by this time, and they'll be expectin' me to clear off." She smiled through her white teeth and crept out of the room, taking the tray and emptied dishes, with the air of a conspirator in grand opera.

"I certainly am in a pleasant hole," soliloquized George. "In the hands of a parcel of unscrupulous rogues. I wonder what General Thomas thinks of my disappearance? He will be getting worried by this time."

The door of the bedroom opened. The fat

man, otherwise Kearfoot, entered and carefully closed the door after him.

"How is the invalid now?" he asked, in a professional manner that indicated the physician rather than the desperado.

"I'm getting along very well," replied George. "But I'm still waiting to find out why I have been brought here."

Kearfoot seated himself upon the one solitary chair, which he drew near the bed. "I'll try to satisfy your youthful curiosity," he said, with the faintest kind of a sneer. "We are a determined set of men," he added, "and have no false sentiment."

"I can see that," returned George dryly. "No sentiment—and no principles."

"Don't be too smart, my young friend," said Kearfoot. He was frowning unpleasantly. "Perhaps, as you say so politely, we have no principles. But the world has never treated us fairly; therefore, why should we bother as to how we treat the world? We propose to get all we can out of the world, and the people in it."

"Go on," urged the boy. "I'm listening."

"We captured you to-day just for the fun of

the thing, and when we learned, from yourself, that you were an aide on General Thomas's staff we concluded that you were a very valuable prisoner."

"Why valuable?"

"Because we may be able to get a fine ransom for you!"

George sprang up in bed. "A ransom?" he cried. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand plain English?" asked the fat man. "I said a ransom. That means that I propose to put myself in communication with General Thomas, tell him that you are held a prisoner, and that if he cares enough for you to pay us ten thousand dollars in gold he can have you back again!"

"If General Thomas finds out that you have me here he'll send enough troops to clean you all out of the house, and seize you into the bargain," said George, in considerable excitement.

"But there comes the point of the whole thing, master—what's your name?"

"My name is George Knight."

"Well, there comes the point of the whole

thing, Master George Knight. General Thomas will never know where we have our head-quarters; therefore he cannot send any troops here. He will receive word telling him, if he wants to ransom you, to send one man—only one man, mark you—to a certain place. And that place will not be within five miles of here. And if that man brings the money, and you are delivered up to him, we can afford to leave this house altogether. So you see that even if you would give our hiding-place away after you got back to camp the birds would be flown. Twenty thousand Union soldiers could not catch them."

"That's a very pretty plan, but how do you know that it will work? Suppose instead of sending one man to 'a certain place,' as you call it, Thomas sends a whole regiment and captures you all?"

Kearfoot laughed contemptuously. "We are not children," he said. "We would be posted in such a way that if Thomas attempted any trick of that kind we should know it in time, and take to the woods."

George sank back on the bed in dismay. "I'm not worth ten thousand dollars, even if the Gen-

eral had it to give," he said. "Supposing that he refuses the ransom? What then?"

"What then?" repeated Kearfoot, surveying the boy with a sardonic smile. "Why, then I will play another card, quite as good, if not better. I will sell you to the Confederates!"

"Sell me to the Confederates?"

"Exactly! I have a friend in the Union camp, and I have heard of your exploit with a certain Captain or Colonel Carton. It was a young aide of Thomas named George Knight. You went into Van Dorn's headquarters as a spy, and he should be glad to buy you back, if only to make an example by hanging you!"

George was appalled at the cool brutality of the man. Only a little while before Kearfoot had dressed his wounded leg with the tenderness of a woman, and now he was coolly proposing, should the scheme for ransom not work, to turn him over, for a price, to be hanged by the Confederates for a spy.

"I thought a while ago you had some humanity," said George, echoing this thought, "when you attended to my wound."

Kearfoot indulged in a nasty chuckle. "If I

had a valuable horse which I wished to sell, and he got wounded, I'd attend to his hurt, wouldn't I?" he asked. "You are a valuable asset, and I didn't propose to let you die of gangrene or blood poisoning."

"I don't believe the Confederates would barter with you to get me. They are honorable enemies."

The eyes of the fat man regarded the boy malevolently. "Let me give you a piece of advice, my youngster," he said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if he wanted to impress every syllable upon George's brain. "You had better do all in your power to induce General Thomas, in a letter I want you to write to him, to ransom you, for, by Bacchus, if you don't, and the Confederates are too squeamish to buy you, I'll turn you over to them for nothing. You can persuade Thomas, if you will. If you won't—well—you know the fate of a spy!"

CHAPTER VII

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

THERE was dead silence in the room for several minutes, as the adversaries regarded each other in the dim light. Each was, indeed, afraid of the other. George saw that this Kearfoot was as clever as he was unscrupulous. Kearfoot recognized that he was dealing with an uncommonly bright boy, who had already outwitted the Confederates and might possibly outwit him.

At last the captor broke the spell. "You're a smart chap," he said, in an insinuating, persuasive voice, "and you must therefore want to be back in the Federal camp rather than go as a present to Van Dorn. As for that ransom money, why what is ten thousand dollars to the United States government? It has money to burn."

He went to the bureau, opened it, and returned with a sheet of note paper and a pencil. Then he picked up, from the bottom of the bed,

George's military cap. "This will make a good writing-desk for you," he explained nonchalantly. He handed the cap and the writing material to the boy. "Now be a sensible fellow," he continued, "and write the following letter, won't you?"

George sat up in bed very straight, put the cap on his well leg, placed the paper on the cap, and quite looked, with the pencil in his hand, as if he were ready to write a whole book.

"Shall I dictate to you?" asked Kearfoot, pleased and at the same time rather surprised at the sudden acquiescence of the boy.

"Go on," answered George, whose face betrayed no emotion whatever.

Kearfoot began as follows, while George's pencil rattled over the paper:

"*General Thomas,*

"*In camp at Murfreesboro.*

"MY DEAR GENERAL,

"I am sorry to inform you that I have been captured by a band of non-partisan guerrillas ——"

"'Non-partisan guerrillas' is certainly a good

expression," interrupted George, who saw the humor in giving a gang of outlaws so elegant a title.

"Very elegant, is it not?" replied the fat man dryly. "It sounds so much better than—than some other expressions uncharitable people might use. But let us go on with the letter:

"I am sorry to inform you that I have been captured by a band of non-partisan guerrillas who have taken me to a hiding place which is so well concealed that the whole Union army could not find it. The gentlemen who have me in charge ——"

"'Gentlemen' is also good!" noted the writer.

"—— The gentlemen who have me in charge inform me that they intend to demand a ransom of ten thousand dollars ——

"Stop," said Kearfoot. "Wait a minute. I think ten thousand dollars is too small a sum to name. You're worth more than that, and we should get more. Go on:

"—— inform me that they intend to demand a ransom of twenty thousand dollars for my delivery, safe and sound, into the Union

camp. If you do not pay the ransom I am to be delivered over to General Van Dorn so that he can hang or shoot me for a spy. You see by this that my captors know of my adventure at Spring Hill. You must also see that if you do not pay the twenty thousand dollars, or get the government to do it, I will be hung by Van Dorn. I implore you, dear General, if you care for me, to let my captors get the money by all means, for I do not want to die. Otherwise my blood will be upon your own head. Remember! It lies with you whether I live or die, and may you do your duty to me.

"Ahem!" said Kearfoot. "You might add:

"I do not know what arrangements will be made as to communicating with you, but you can repose full trust in whoever is the bearer of this letter. Let me solemnly warn you to deal squarely with my captors. Do not attempt to capture me from them, and thus avoid paying the ransom. If you make any such attempt you will only put my life in danger. *Pay the ransom.*

"Underline that last sentence—'*pay the ransom,*'" directed Kearfoot.

"I have done it," said the boy, making the required line.

"Now sign your name to it."

George's face flushed. "What?" he cried. "Do you think that I'd put my name to such a cowardly letter as that? A letter which whines for my life, and makes it look as if I were afraid to die! A letter that no real soldier would ever write! Why, I would far rather be hung twenty times over than sign this thing. It might get the ransom from General Thomas, but never again would he have any feeling for me but contempt—and a contempt which I would fully deserve."

With the last word the angry boy tore the note into a hundred bits.

Kearfoot stalked hastily up and down the room. George had expected him to be furious, but he seemed, rather, to be more reflective than angry.

"If you won't write the kind of note I wanted you to," he said, finally, "you will simply have to take your chances. That letter I dictated would have brought twenty thousand dollars—nay, fifty or a hundred thousand dollars—from

General Thomas. I'll bet on that. But, as it is, we must do our own work in the affair. I think we'll get the money. If we don't—well, then you must make up your mind to be sent to the Confederate camp at Spring Hill."

"I'll take the risk," answered George, grimly but valiantly. "I'll do anything but write crying, cowardly letters to my General."

"Can't say that I blame you," continued the fat man. He had lost his sneering tone; it almost seemed as if he admired the stand which the boy had taken. "Perhaps that letter I dictated was too strong—or rather too crawling—but let it pass. It's your risk, not mine."

"If General Thomas wishes to ransom me of his own accord," said George, "I have, naturally, no objection. But as for begging him—Bah!"

"I'll leave you for the night," exclaimed Kearfoot, after he had perambulated the floor for several more minutes, "and I'll lock the door after me—just by way of precaution. You can't get out of the windows—your game leg would not let you."

As he spoke he moved towards the door; he

was gone the next instant. The key grated outside in the lock.

George sank back upon the bed and began to think. If he had taken a purely selfish view of the case he would have concluded that the probabilities were in favor of his being ransomed. For he knew, as he could not help knowing, that General Thomas was very fond of him, and would strain every nerve to get his young aide from the clutches of these rascals. Yet the boy hated to think that his capture would entail upon the government, or upon individual officers, the payment on his behalf of twenty thousand dollars. If the government could not make such an expenditure then Thomas might try to raise it by individual subscriptions among the officers of the Army of the Cumberland. That was a humiliating idea to the lad. He hated to feel that he might be put in the position of an object of charity. Indeed, there came to him a keen sense of mortification that he should have fallen into a situation by capture where he should put his fellow-countrymen to trouble and expense.

"Yet perhaps I am too conceited," he thought; "it may be that no one will dream of wasting so

much money on a young lieutenant. Why should they? I would have to be much more important than I am to be worth twenty thousand dollars, or a hundredth part of it, to the United States Army."

So thinking he became drowsy, and would have fallen asleep had it not been for the voices of the "non-partisan guerillas" on the ground floor, which, at times, became raised in controversy. Once he heard Dave say: "That's my trick, and I ain't agoing to have you take it away from me—d'ye hear?"

There was a heated response, and an oath from Dave. Then the voice of Kearfoot, speaking with an air of authority intervened. "Look here, you fools," it said, "I don't allow anything like fighting amongst us. When thieves fall out honest men get their dues. In other words, if we quarrel, particularly over such a little thing as cards, some one comes in and does us up!"

"You're right, Captain," cried a voice. "If we quarrel, and fight each other dead, like the Kilkenny cats, then our young friend up-stairs may take to the woods, and escape. Stop your fussing, boys, and begin a new hand of poker."

There was some demur at first, from the growling that George could hear, but finally peace seemed to be restored, through the good offices of Kearfoot. The game was resumed, and the sound of cards being slapped roughly upon a table could be detected. But sleep was now conquering the prisoner above. He was only conscious, at last, of the wood-fire, in which he seemed to see the images of General Thomas and Rufus Carton. The lamp now began to flicker; in a few minutes it went out. The fire, too, was burning low. Darkness was hovering over the room. Soon George was well in the Land of Nod. He was dreaming that he stood in a court room in front of a judge who was none other than General Thomas. Before the judge stood Kearfoot, in the prisoner's dock. "Kearfoot," the General was saying, "you are found guilty, and I hereby convict you to a hundred years in the guard-house!" Just as the prisoner was about to bow low in submission the dream changed. George imagined that standing over him was Kearfoot, holding a bowie-knife in one hand and a huge stick in the other.

The next instant he awoke with the instinctive

feeling that somebody was near him. The room was pitch dark, now that lamp and fire were both out. At first he could see nothing. Then a low voice, as if from some mysterious depths, asked, "Is ye awake, honey?"

George started up in bed, rubbed his eyes very hard, and found a large black figure bending over him. "Doan be frightened," it said; "it's only me—old Chloe."

"My but you gave me chills and fever for a second," laughed the boy.

Chloe put a warning hand upon the boy's arm. "Please doan speak so loud," she whispered; "some of dem brutes o' men might hear."

"How did you get in here?" asked George, lowering his tone. "Kearfoot locked me in when he left me."

"Yeah, honey, but he leaves de key in the doah, outside, and so I have only to turn it sort of sneak-like, and I am in de room. My lands, I was 'fraid as you would scream when you found some un was in de room, and den dat Kearfoot would come runnin' in. But praise be to de Lord, dey all sat up late into de night playin' and drinkin', and dey'll sleep heavy—dart the

villains! Ef dey didn't pay me sech big wages an' I didn't have a lazy fam'ly o' niggers at home to support, Chloe would never work for 'em—no, by jiminy!"

"But what are you coming here for anyway?" asked the boy, who was very much mystified at this nocturnal appearance of the negress. "If one of those ruffians had heard you coming in they might have killed you."

"I ain't no man's fool," chuckled Chloe quietly. "D'ye think, honey, I'd live in dis den o' thieves without bein' armed? I allus carry a razor with me, yeah, or a big knife in me busum, and I take no nonsense from any of 'em."

"But what do you want?" continued George.

"Why, young massa, I jes' know dese men are plottin' you some harm and I couldn't rest till I saw you an' tole ye ef dere's any way o' poor Aunt Chloe helpin' you, she'd gwine and do it. I took a fancy to yer nice hones' face de momen' I dun see you."

"You're a trump, Chloe," whispered George fervently. A lump came into his throat; there was something infinitely touching to him about the disinterestedness of this woman who in

order to help him had risked her life among the desperadoes now asleep. "I am afraid," he added, "there's nothing you can do for me, Chloe; but I thank you just as much as if you had a pair of wings and could fly away with me to the Union camp."

"Tell me, honey, what de men are gwine to do wid you?"

George told the old woman, as briefly as possible, exactly what Kearfoot planned.

"De black-hearted scoundrels!" whispered Chloe. "I knew dey was imps o' Satan, but I nebber thinks dey would do as bad as dis! And oh, sonny, sonny boy, suppose de Fed'ral Generel refuse to gib de ranscom?"

"I'm afraid in that case I'll find myself in General Van Dorn's camp, and have myself court-martialed for a spy."

The cook wrung her hands with a quaint display of feeling that was at once serious and yet comic. "Jerusha!" she moaned, under her breath, "you must nebber take dat risk, honey. I wouldn't mind it so much ef you was a grown man—but a boy like you. Ye look jes' like a white boy I used to be a mammy for way down

in Georgia years ago. It shan' be—I tell ye, it shan' be!"

"But I can't see yet what I'm going to do about it, Chloe? If I only had some way of getting word to General Thomas, telling him where I was, he might send a troop of cavalry here and seize this whole gang. But I haven't, and the only chance for me is by escaping from this house, which doesn't seem very hopeful, on account of my wounded leg. I'm afraid, although it's not much of a wound, that I couldn't run very far with it. Besides, I'll be watched like a hawk."

"Let me go to de camp," whispered Chloe excitedly. "I'll go now, and not come back till I comes wid a spontoon of troops"—by which she doubtless meant a "platoon."

George's heart bounded at the thought. He could already see, in fancy, a regiment of horsemen dashing up to this old house, as they surrounded the outlaws and freed himself amid wild cheers. Hardly, however, had this tempting prospect burst upon him than there came another thought which dashed all his hopes.

"It wouldn't do, Chloe," he explained, very reluctantly. "If you disappeared from here these

fellows would smell a rat at once. They would know that you had gone off for a reason, and, suspecting treachery, would probably decamp from here, taking me with them."

Chloe considered for a minute. Then she said: "But it needn't be ole Chloe to go. S'posin' I sends some un else?"

"How on earth can you do that, Chloe?" asked George.

The woman's answer was very much to the point. Her family, she explained, consisted of two sisters, a daughter, and two sons, both grown men. The females took in washing now and then, but the sons were constitutionally opposed to working, and spent most of their time either loafing, hunting rabbits or trapping birds. It was now about three o'clock in the morning, and Chloe proposed creeping out of the house, going to her home, only a mile and a quarter away, waking up one of her sons, and ordering him to take a message to General Thomas at break of day. Then Chloe would steal back again to the house, which she would enter long before the "non-partisan guerrillas" had arisen. The son, upon being taken to General Thomas, was to de-

scribe the plight of the young aide, and offer to guide troops back to the house occupied by the outlaws.

"Ches'peake Maryland kin do it," added the negress. "He's de good-for-nuffinest nigger as evah lived—he took dat from his daddy—but he's got his mammy's brains."

"Are you sure he will go?" asked the boy.

"Ef he won' I'll give him such a lickin' he won' forget soon."

"Tell him he will be well paid for it, if he gets the troops here," said George.

Without more parleying Chloe left the bed and crept softly to the door. Here she listened carefully, and when assured that the coast was clear, she left the room, gently closed the door, and locked it on the outside. As George listened he could hear an occasional creaking of boards, as the ponderous negress made her way slowly and stealthily down the wide staircase.

But, oh, wretched moment! Her foot must have slipped in the darkness, for there was a stumble, and then down the stairs to the ground floor went rolling two hundred and more pounds of fat. The nature of the noise was unmistak-

able; poor George gave a groan of disappointment and despair. At the very time when things began to look hopeful were they to be upset? Were the sleepers in the house to be awakened, and their suspicions roused by this fatal misstep?

A door in the second story opened; some one ran out in stocking feet and listened. There was the sound of striking a match and of lighting a candle; then the person could be heard quickly descending the staircase.

The prisoner grew so excited that he cautiously got out of bed and limped to the door. He heard the voice of Kearfoot at the bottom of the stairs, pronouncing Chloe's name in great surprise. It seemed as if the cook were muttering something, and as if she groaned once or twice.

"Poor thing!" thought George. "Perhaps she has hurt herself in her tumble."

But he did not wait to hear more, for it was plain that Kearfoot was ascending the staircase. He hurried back into bed, as quietly as possible. Up, up came the footsteps, and finally they stopped short at the boy's door. The key turned, and Kearfoot, half-dressed, and holding a lighted candle in his hand, entered the room. George

had just time to close his eyes, and indulge in a mild snore. The man crept over to the bed, leaned over the boy, and flashed the light in his face.

It went through George's mind that if he were really asleep he should wake up under such a searching light. So he turned in the bed, stretched out his arms, and gradually opened his eyes with the air of one who has been aroused from a heavy slumber.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded, in a sleepy voice.

"No trouble," answered Kearfoot. "Only Chloe, our nigger, is lying at the bottom of the stairs dead drunk. I suppose we'll have no breakfast in the morning."

"Dead drunk?" George was puzzled. He knew that Chloe had been perfectly sober. Had she been injured, and had the fat man mistaken a fainting spell for a drunken fit, or was she simply playing a part? 'Twas a hard question to answer.

It was evident that Kearfoot had been awakened by the noise of Chloe falling on the stairs, but that he had no suspicions.

"What do you want with me?" asked George, boldly enough.

"Only looked in to see if you were still safe and snug here," growled the man.

"You certainly didn't think I was going to walk home with this leg of mine?" queried George.

"No, but you're a keen lad; and it's always worth while keeping an eye on such as you."

Kearfoot laughed, in a sardonic way, and went back to the door. "Remember, young man," he said warningly, as he held the candle so that his face was plainly in evidence; "remember that you can't get away from this house unless we take you, and if you try to go in any other way, I won't give a farthing for your life!" He left the room, turned the key on the outside, and evidently went back to his own chamber to sleep.

George was in a perfect fever of anxiety. He could not understand the situation. The idea that Chloe was in a drunken stupor was preposterous. She was either feigning or so injured that she had become unconscious. "If she is really hurt," he thought, "I should go down to

her. Heaven knows, she did all she could to help me, and it's plainly my duty to help her." But then he suddenly bethought him that the door was locked from the outside, and that he was still a prisoner.

The boy tossed upon his bed for fifteen minutes. It seemed, at last, as if he heard the front door of the house quietly open. But the sound, if it were not, indeed, simply his imagination, was so faint that he could hardly think he had heard aright. Several minutes later there was a slight tapping on one of the window panes. This tapping was followed by another, and then another. Some one must be throwing pebbles up from the ground.

George jumped from the bed, and reached the window. He did not open it, fearing to make a noise, but he looked out into the darkness. He was well rewarded for his peering into the gloom. Beneath the window stood the unmistakable figure of old Chloe.

Chloe waved one black hand towards the watcher at the window, and then disappeared in the direction of the road through the wood. The darkness hid her entirely from view.

George gave a deep sigh of relief, as he returned to his bed.

"That drunken stupor was only a blind to deceive Kearfoot," he thought. His conclusion, as it needs hardly be added, was perfectly correct. Chloe, in descending the stairs, had missed her footing, and when she realized what she had done, and that the leader of the outlaws was coming out of his room, she hit upon this expedient to avoid suspicion. For had he thought she was prowling around the house when in full possession of her senses he would have scented danger at once.

"She has gotton off after all," went on the boy to himself, as his head once more rested upon the pillow. And then he drifted into a pleasant sleep, dreamless and refreshing. In the meantime a large black figure was creeping through the grim woods, as it stopped here and there to listen. Once it muttered: "You shan't be hung, honey, not ef ole Chloe knows, an' she thinks she do." Then it pushed on into the darkness.

It must have been about eight o'clock in the morning when George awoke. For a second he

could not recall just where he was as he looked around him at the shabby room, and then through the windows at the trees hemming in the house. Then it flashed upon him where he was imprisoned, and what had occurred within the past twenty-four hours. "If Chloe only got through all right," he thought. Suppose that for some reason she had not been able to return to this house without escaping detection? It was not a pleasant reflection.

But almost immediately the key was turned, and Chloe herself entered the room. She carried a bucket of water, a rough towel and a large piece of brown soap.

"Here's some washin' material, young man," she said, in a loud voice, as she placed the "material" on the floor near the bed. "I'll bring ye up breakfast as soon as I've fed de gentlemen of de house."

George was about to ask her the one great question that rose to his lips, but was fortunately restrained by a warning glance from the negress, who also put one hand upon her capacious mouth. Hardly had she made the signal when Kearfoot

entered the room. His eyes were bloodshot; he seemed very cross and nervous.

"You're a nice nigger," he said to Chloe, with the accent on the adjective. "I found you in a sweet condition a few hours ago. It didn't take you long to recover, either."

The negress hung her head, in order to signify due shame and repentance. George gave the fat man a keen look. "Does he think she was suspiciously quick in recovering?" he said to himself. But the fact was that Kearfoot had no such suspicion; he was merely admiring what he thought must be the woman's wonderful recuperative powers.

"Come," he demanded, "ain't you going to say you were sorry?"

"I'll nevah do it no moah," whined Chloe. "An' I'll give you all de bes' breakfast you evah had, to make up fo' it. Poor ole Chloe nevah touch a drop o' anything agin 'ceptin' spring water."

"See that you don't," said Kearfoot, "and now go down and get that breakfast ready, for we men have important business on hand."

Chloe shuffled out of the room. George was

still utterly in the dark as to the results of her visit to her lazy offspring, Chesapeake Maryland.

"And how did you sleep, my young friend?" enquired Kearfoot, in a tone that was meant to be propitious.

"Pretty well, considering my surroundings," growled the boy. He could not help feeling angry because the leader had interrupted his *tête-à-tête* with the cook. "What are you going to do with me to-day?" he asked.

"This is my programme," answered Kearfoot. "Myself and three of my men will try to put ourselves in communication with General Thomas to-day—if we can do it with safety to ourselves. The two other men will remain here in the house to keep an eye on you, for though you might have a slow time in escaping, on account of your leg, yet you might contrive to get word to the Federals in some way, and then they would try to rescue you without paying that twenty thousand dollars."

Kearfoot's words suggested so strongly exactly what George was trying to do that it was with much difficulty the latter could look at his adversary without changing countenance.

"Well, whatever you do," said George, with an affectation of great weariness,—"whether you ransom me to General Thomas or send me as a present to Van Dorn, I wish you'd be quick about it. It will be dreary work for me staying shut up in this gloomy house." He looked through the windows as he spoke, and noticed that although the sun was shining brightly yet the woods surrounding the house shut out much of the light and sparkle of the day.

"Don't worry about that," replied Kearfoot, smiling in a cynical way. "We are just as anxious to be rid of you as you are to be rid of us. When we part, the pleasure will be mutual, as the Union and Confederate soldiers will say to one another after they have fought each other for a couple of years more."

So saying he left the room, locking the door after him. George thereupon arose, not without some difficulty on account of his leg, and proceeded to make his morning toilet with the assistance of the water and brown soap which the faithful Chloe had brought him. Since he had joined the army it had been his fate to undergo a number of privations, but brown soap was

something new in his experience. "Still, it's clean," he said, "even if it does smell so nasty," and, contenting himself with that reflection, he made good use of this rather strong cleanser.

Hardly had he completed his ablutions and dressed himself ere Chloe returned, bringing with her a steaming breakfast consisting of hot corn cakes, butter, fried eggs, coffee, and sausages. She placed her tray upon the bureau, and motioned George to help himself.

"I can't eat a thing," said the boy, "until you tell me what success you had."

Chloe folded her arms and looked very stern. "Honey," she said, almost imperiously, "ye must eat everything on dat waiter 'fore I says a thing to you. Ain't poor old Chloe got to think o' her boy's health?"

The tears came into George's eyes, unexpectedly and unwanted. There was something so kindly and motherly in the tone and look of the sable cook that it brought another lump to his throat.

"All right," he answered, "it shall be pleasure before business." So he pulled the solitary chair of the room up to the bureau, and, without

another word, proceeded to demolish his breakfast, whilst the negress employed her spare time by making up the bed. She had served the "non-partisans" with breakfast just before she came to the boy.

When George had finished his meal (and, as he had a youthful, healthy appetite, the process did not consume over-much time) he rose from his chair and confronted Chloe. "Tell me quickly," he said, "what luck you had?"

"No luck," answered the negress.

"No luck?" echoed the prisoner. "What do you mean?"

"I didn't have no luck, massa, but doan give up hope. Ole Chloe's a lookin' out fo' you yet. When I got to home early dis mornin' ef I didn't find as Ches'peake Maryland and de rest o' de fam'ly, 'ceptin' my daughter Rosa, as had a gone to a black dance five miles off, and wouldn't be back till sunrisin'. So I daresn't stay there, only I tole Rosa as to tell Ches'peake Maryland as he was to come here dis mornin' without lettin' on I'd sent for him. Ef he comes—and ef he don't I'll spank him, tho' he be over forty—ef he comes, I say, I'll tell him what he's to do,

and then he can make for de Union camp, honey?"

"How will you see him, Chloe?" asked George. He was bitterly disappointed that the negress had not found her son; already, had he fondly imagined Chesapeake Maryland might be in the camp at Murfreesboro.

"I left word," she answered, "as he was to creep up behind de barn at de back o' de house, and whistle twice, like a mocking bird. Then I'll gwine out behind de barn, and give de ole ramscallian his obstructions."

"You think you understand what those 'obstructions' are?" asked George. And he went over exactly what Chesapeake Maryland was to say to General Thomas, and how the negro was to explain that instead of paying one cent's ransom the simplest way was to send a troop of cavalry to the boy's prison in the woods.

"Hallelujah!" cried Chloe. "I know what to tell dat ere worthless nigger."

"Hush!" whispered the lad. He heard footsteps on the stairway. Chloe flew to the waiter, with the empty plates, which she hastily seized. As she was about to leave the room there

stalked into it the plethoric Kearfoot. He was followed by Dave and one of his companions, a man with sandy hair and beard who was afterwards addressed as "Charlie."

For some reason the leader seemed to be in a bad humor. "Look you, Knight," he growled; "while I go off with the rest of the party I shall leave you here with these two men until I come back, and tell you the success of our negotiations with your General Thomas. And I've instructed them to shoot you on the spot if you make any attempt to escape!"

"Brave man!" cried George, sarcastically. "As if I could escape with that shot you put into my leg, yesterday."

"Don't be impertinent," retorted Kearfoot. "If there wasn't a hope of getting twenty thousand dollars for you I would be tempted to put a few more bullets into you, and punish you for an impudent child. But I won't waste time by fighting with you. Here, Dave and Charlie, you understand your duty. This boy may go downstairs, if he wants, but he's not to leave the house under any pretext. As for Chloe here, she must not leave the house either; d'ye understand?"

The two men nodded assent. Chloe and George interchanged looks of secret dismay. If Chloe was not to leave the house, how was communication to be had with Chesapeake Maryland?

"There never was a woman yet, white or black, who wasn't a gossip," went on Kearfoot, "and I don't want her running home to her family or neighbors and giving things away about the boy. She is to stay in this house, and not move one step outside until I get home again tonight."

Chloe had wit enough to pretend to be perfectly indifferent to this edict. But her heart sank; so, too, did the heart of George. All hope seemed gone. Neither of the two dared to utter a word of protest.

Kearfoot turned on his heel and moved towards the door. "Mind your eye, boy," he said, "and perhaps you'll be free before long. You've no message for General Thomas, eh?" He looked at George sharply.

"Tell the General I'm not worth a dollar's ransom," said the boy.

"How modest you are," sneered Kearfoot.

With that parting shot he walked out of the room. He was followed, shortly after, by the disconsolate Chloe. She cast one parting look at George, which seemed to say: "I have done my best, but I have failed."

Dave and Charlie turned, with one accord, to their prisoner. "You can go downstairs, if you want," said the former.

"I don't care much where I go," answered George, as he limped out of the bed-chamber, in company with the two men, and made his way down the staircase. For once in his life he felt discouraged, thoroughly and completely.

CHAPTER VIII

CHECKMATED

SEVERAL hours later General Thomas could have been found, had we chosen to peep into his headquarters, sitting by the fire in deepest thought. There was an expression of intense worriment upon his usually unruffled face.

"And still no signs of George," he was saying to himself. "He has been gone nearly twenty-four hours, and the last trace of him was when he left the outposts to skate. The neighborhood of the pond has been searched, other places outside the fortifications have been scoured by soldiers, but still he doesn't come. Either he has met with accident, or else he has fallen into the hands of some Confederates."

He rose from his chair and began impatiently to pace the room. He had never appreciated until now how strongly attached to his young aide he had become. As he racked his brain for some plausible explanation of the boy's absence, an orderly entered the room and saluted.

"Have you any news of Knight?" cried Thomas, half eagerly, half fearfully. He feared that he might yet see George's dead body being brought into camp.

"No, General," answered the soldier. "I came to say that a man has come up to the outposts on the eastern side and demands to see you on very important business. He says he knows you will want to have an interview with him."

"Is he a Confederate?"

"No, sir; he is in civilian dress, and rather a rough-looking fellow."

"Let him come in," directed the General. "Bring him here." He thought it probable that the man was a Tennessean friendly to the Union cause who might want to give him information about the movement of the Confederates.

The orderly soon returned, leading a fat man. He was none other than Kearfoot. The former stood guard at the door, while the outlaw advanced into the room and made a respectful bow to the General, who stood near the hearth.

"Is this the great General Thomas?" asked Kearfoot, in a voice that was meant to be conciliatory.

Thomas's face hardened. "Come, come," he said gruffly; "I didn't send for you that I might listen to your compliments. What do you want of me?"

"I beg your pardon, General," returned Kearfoot, with a malicious gleam in his eyes. "If you're busy I'll come back later. I merely wanted to tell you something about a young aide of yours—George Knight, I think, is his name."

Thomas was transformed. His contemptuous look turned to one of almost painful interest, as he asked, in a tone of entreaty, "What of him? Tell me in Heaven's name! Is he well?"

"He is perfectly well," answered the stranger, "save for a slight wound in the leg."

"Thank God!" murmured the General. "Tell me where he is—why he didn't turn up in camp last night—tell me what you know, quickly!"

"It's a long story, General," began the outlaw, as if uncertain just how to begin.

"Then cut it very short, man," cried Thomas. "Can't you see that I am hungry for news of the boy!"

"Oh, very well," said Kearfoot. "Young

Knight is at present in the hands of some non-partisan guerrillas."

"Non-partisan guerrillas?"

"I suppose you would call them robbers and outlaws, but that doesn't matter. When Knight was skating yesterday afternoon he was caught by these men, shot in the leg, and carried off."

"Carried off! what for?"

"In order that he might be returned to you upon the payment of twenty thousand dollars to me. I am the leader of the guerrillas!"

The General was thunderstruck. His amazement seemed to be only equaled by his anger. He fairly glared at Kearfoot as he cried: "You scoundrel!"

The leader laughed like a man who thinks he has the best of the situation. "Call me all the names you like," he replied quietly. "I simply offer you a chance to redeem the boy. If you don't choose to pay the money within twenty-four hours—well—then ——" He paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"Go on," ordered Thomas sternly.

"If you won't, why then we will deliver him

over to General Van Dorn as a spy who entered his camp as a farmer's boy two weeks ago."

The orderly at the door so far forgot discipline in the presence of his General as to shake his fist in Kearfoot's face and shout: "Villain!" Thomas himself hardly heard the voice. He was looking intently at the outlaw's face as he might have looked at the Spirit of Evil. At last he said: "I think I'll have you taken out of the house and hung on the nearest tree!"

"You can do anything you want with me, General, but I feel it my duty to warn you that my men have orders to shoot Knight if I am detained for another hour in camp!"

"I see what kind of rogue I am dealing with," answered Thomas calmly. "How long do I have to raise this twenty thousand dollars?"

"Say until noon to-morrow. I can come back into camp then, and if you have decided to pay the ransom I will arrange to have Knight turned over to you."

"And how would Knight be turned over to us?"

Kearfoot laughed provokingly. "I don't intend to tell you that until to-morrow. If I gave

away my plans now you might try to trap me—perhaps make us all prisoners. If you pay the money the boy will be restored to you; otherwise ——" and the leader pointed significantly to his neck, to suggest the hangman's noose.

Thomas, by an almost superhuman effort, restrained his desire to knock the man down. "Lead this fellow out of camp," he said to the orderly, "and I'll expect him to-morrow at noon."

The orderly ushered Kearfoot out of the room, after the latter had bowed low to General Thomas with an air of mock deference.

"I don't object to war," said the General to himself, once more pacing up and down the floor, "but I do object to savage rascality. George must be saved, even if we have to pay the ransom. But is there no way of getting hold of these fellows between now and to-morrow?"

As if in unconscious answer to this question Kearfoot suddenly poked his head back into the room. "Don't bother to hunt us down, General," he said, "for you'll never be able to find us." The next instant he was gone.

"There's nearly twenty-four hours in which to work," thought Thomas. "The first thing to do is to have a consultation with my staff." And he rang for a servant.

* * * * * *

Let us now return to George Knight. We will find him ensconced in a room on the ground floor at the back of the house, directly across the hallway from the kitchen. The boy concluded that it was used as a card-room, a conjecture in which he happened to be correct. A large table covered with green baize was in the centre of the apartment; here and there were dilapidated chairs whose red "rep" covers had faded into a dirty brown; on one side was a wood-fire; on the walls, from which the paper was gradually falling, hung old-fashioned engravings that might have been there since the house was built.

With the boy were both Dave and Charlie, who were lounging about the room, each smoking a very strong pipe.

"This playing jailer to a boy is poor fun," growled Dave, looking at George who was gazing gloomily out of a window at the barn in the rear.

Charlie put his hands in his pockets and smiled. "Think of that twenty thousand dollars," he said.

"What'll you and I get out of it, Charlie?"

"If we don't get our full share there will be trouble," retorted Charlie. "Kearfoot must play us square."

Suddenly George heard the shrill call of a mocking bird. It seemed to come from behind the barn. "That is the signal of Chesapeake Maryland," he thought, as he felt like biting away his lips in sheer vexation. The negro was on hand, ready to take a thousand messages to the Union camp, yet neither he nor Chloe could communicate with him. Chloe had been locked up in the kitchen by Dave who, heeding the directions of Kearfoot, had seen to it that the old woman should find no chance to leave the house to "gossip" with friends or relatives.

Once more came that provoking whistle of the mocker. The two outlaws sat down at the table and began to play a game of cards, by the aid of a very greasy pack which they had produced from the shelf of the fireplace. George remained

at the window, as if spellbound at the sound of the bird's piercing notes.

A third time came the whistle. George stamped his foot on the floor with rage, but fortunately recollected that he was not alone. Then a curious thing happened. He heard a window of the kitchen quietly open, and a voice—the melodious voice of none other than old Chloe—burst out with:

"Come up an' see de ole woman,
Come up an' see ole Chloe;
Creep up, come up, you niggah boy,
An' be very careful what you do."

The verse was sung as if it were part of some old negro plantation melody, in that weird yet pleasant cadence which characterizes the vocalization of the untrained Southern "darky." But George, by virtue of his position at the window, could hear every word of it distinctly. A thrill went through him. He knew that the verse was an *impromptu*, and was meant as an invitation to Chesapeake Maryland to creep cautiously up to the kitchen. How his heart did leap at the prospect that even yet there was a chance of notifying General Thomas.

"What's that nigger screeching about?" asked Charlie, suspending the game of cards.

"I'll see that she ain't up to any mischief," muttered Dave. He rose from the table, walked across the hallway, and unlocked the door of the kitchen.

When he entered the room, which did not smell the sweeter on account of lard burning in the great fireplace, Chloe was poking the blazing logs therein and singing, at the pitch of her lungs, "Old Folks at Home." One window, the one from which she had warbled her instructions to her son, was still open.

"What are you up to, old woman?" asked Dave, eyeing her critically, and nearly choking from the fumes of the burning lard.

"Me, massa?" asked Chloe, with an air of injured innocence which would have done credit to a great actress. "I'm a gettin' things ready fo' your dinnah, lor' bless you."

"What's that window open for?"

"Because de kitchen done gone and smell so as I'm nearly comberflusticated."

The odor was certainly unpleasant enough to

suggest that any one might be "comberflusticated" in such an atmosphere.

"Are you intending to jump out of it?" asked the outlaw, resolved to be suspicious of an attempt to escape.

Chloe laughed until the tears ran down her face, and beat her enormous black hands upon her chest. "De idea o' big Chloe a leapin' out dat window," she cried. She stood in front of it, and made motions that were evidently intended as a comparison between her size and the size of the kitchen window. The cook weighed some two hundred and fifty pounds, and it was plain that she could not possibly emerge through the opening unless she should be squeezed out by means of a derrick or shot out from a huge cannon.

Even Dave could not help laughing at the comparison. "Well, don't try any tricks," he said, "or you'll get yourself in hot water."

"Trust ole Chloe," answered the negress, rolling up her eyes and assuming an attitude of the most pious simplicity.

Dave locked the door upon Chloe and returned to his game of cards. "She's safe enough," he remarked. "The door's locked and

she is too big to get out of a window. It's my play, isn't it? You played that ace?"

George knew that Chloe had been clever enough to pull the wool over the keen eyes of his captor. He uttered a secret exclamation of thanks, walked up and down the room several times, and then returned to the window. He would watch developments.

It so happened that the distance between the barn, a decaying stone structure of goodly proportions, and the mansion house was about twenty yards. The intervening space was occupied by the remains of an old flower garden, long since allowed to go to seed, whose principal feature now consisted of serpentine walks bordered by hedges of green box which had grown, in the course of many years, to a height of four or five feet. It was, therefore, comparatively easy to reach the house unseen by creeping around these hedges, and that was exactly what Chesapeake Maryland did. George caught one glimpse of a dark figure crawling upon its stomach, like a snake, and then could detect it no more. He longed to see more, to know more, but it was impossible.

This is what actually occurred. Chesapeake Maryland, a tall, middle-aged negro, with bright eyes and a shining, grinning face, crept up to within several feet of the open kitchen window, where his mother was now standing. She made a sign to him which seemed to say: "Go to the side of the house, where there is no danger of your being seen from the people in the back room."

It should be borne in mind that the room wherein George and his captors were and the room used as a kitchen were both at the back of the house, separated by the hallway, but that the side of the first room had a western outlook, and the side of the kitchen an eastern outlook. Therefore, when Chesapeake Maryland, obeying his mother's directions, crawled to the kitchen side of the house he was quite out of sight of the enemy, and would be, too, so long as the latter stayed in the card-room.

Chloe opened a window on this eastern side, very slowly and quietly, and motioned to her son. He picked himself up, and stood boldly on the ground.

"Come, you lazy niggah!" whispered Chloe. "Jump in here!"

Chesapeake Maryland took a flying leap, vaulted across the window sill, and being barefooted landed silently upon the floor of the kitchen.

His mother regarded him with a superior, cynical air that was really comic. "Ain't you a good-fo'-nothin' pickaninny," she said, in a low but emphatic tone. "You ornery niggah! where were you last night, when I wanted yo' so much? Gone to a dance! What wid dancin' by night an' loafin' by day you pass a useful life, doan you?"

Chesapeake Maryland hung his head, as if he had been detected in the greatest of crimes. He wore a pair of check flannel pants, a blue flannel shirt and a dirty palmetto hat, from which the brim had long since disappeared.

"Dreadful sorry, mammy," he replied.

"Doan talk so vociferous," warned his mother, under her breath. "There's men on de other side o' de hall. Come here, rascalmuffin, and listen to old Chloe, the mother o' a thankless pickaninny."

The "rascalmuffin" cautiously approached his lady mother. He was careful not to get too

near her, for he knew, by many hard experiences, that, when not satisfied with him, she would give him more than one lusty box upon the ear. But in this instance she forgot to administer the aforesaid box. She shuffled to the door leading out into the hallway, put her ear to the keyhole, and, after convincing herself that no one was listening, returned to Chesapeake Maryland, who bore upon his shining face a pacific grin. He had taken off his hat to show his respect for his fat parent.

"Say, Ches'peake," whispered Chloe, "do yo' want to redeem your character fo' bein' de most good-fo'-nuffin' niggah in Tennessee?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Chesapeake Maryland, putting on a smile that was intended to be propitiatory. One might have supposed, from his whole manner and bearing, that he was a boy of ten, tied to his mother's apron-strings, rather than a man of mature age.

"Yo' have got to work like a mule to-day," said Chloe, looking upon him sternly, "but yo' are not to run like a mule. You must run like a horse!"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Chesapeake Mary-

land, very meekly. The fact was that Chesapeake had remained at the dance until an unusually late or early hour, and he felt more than usually conscience-stricken. So when he heard of his mother's visit to his home he resolved to see her, as she had requested, and do all that he could to keep her in good humor. For the old woman ruled him, even at a distance, with a rod of iron, and he would no more have defied her than he would have defied a whole division of infantry.

Then Chloe told him, in low tones, and as briefly as she could, the whole circumstances of George Knight's capture. She told him, too, how he was to make quick pace for the Union camp, and communicate to the authorities there the boy's predicament. He was to explain the exact location of the freebooter's house and offer to lead back to it as many troops as General Rosecrans or Thomas cared to send. Furthermore, Chesapeake Maryland was to warn the Union officers that, in the meantime, no ransom of any kind was to be paid to Kearfoot or his companions. The main thing necessary was to rescue George before any payment became due,

or before the outlaws had turned him over to the jurisdiction of Van Dorn, the Confederate general.

"An' now, you lazy niggah," said Chloe, after she had finished her instructions, "do yo' think yo' got enough brains to understand what I want you to do?"

Chesapeake Maryland might be indolent, but he was no fool. Quite the contrary, indeed. He thoroughly understood every detail communicated to him by his sable mother, and was, moreover, anxious to engage in this conspiracy. "Doan be afeered, mother," he answered. "I'se no idiot! I'll engage to have de Union troops here befo' nigh'fall."

"Ef yo' do, yo' niggah," murmured Chloe, "I'll engage never more to box your big ears again! Show that yo' are good for somethin' more than shootin' rabbits!"

Chesapeake Maryland put on his hat. He was about to vault out of the side window when, to his consternation and that of his mother, the key of the door leading from the hallway creaked, and the door itself was hastily thrown open. At the threshold was Dave. The two con-

spirators stood still, as if they had been suddenly struck with paralysis. Here was an unexpected situation.

"Hah, my fine lady," said Dave, very quietly. "You are receiving visitors to-day, are you? And you knew it was particularly desired that you should have no communication with the outside world to-day? Eh, Chloe?"

Chloe recovered her presence of mind in an instant. "This gemmin," she explained, pointing to Chesapeake Maryland, "is farmin' hereabouts, and he's jest brought me stuff for our supper."

The truth was that all the supplies for the house in the woods, with the exception of milk, procured from two cows in the barn, were brought there by the outlaws, who were fearful lest any stranger should penetrate to their hiding-place. It was therefore forbidden that Chloe should buy anything from the outside, save what the "gang" itself provided. Furthermore, Dave knew that Chloe had been in close converse with this negro intruder for some minutes, although he had not been able, even by listening through the keyhole, to understand

what was said. Having become once again suspicious, he had left his game of cards and crept into the hallway.

"Come, now," thundered Dave. "What are you telling this nigger?"

"He be my own son, Ches'peake Maryland," cried Chloe, "and he's brought me chicken for supper."

"Chicken!" echoed Dave. "Ah, indeed? And where's the chicken?"

There was not a chicken in the whole house. Chloe had not expected that her prevarication would be followed up in this way. She stopped short, without a word. Her wit had deserted her. But Chesapeake Maryland realized that with him it was a case of "now or never." With one bound he leaped out of the side kitchen window and disappeared.

"I'll have his black skin," cried Dave. He drew a pistol from his belt, and, running to the window, aimed it at the retreating form of Chesapeake Maryland. Just as he fired, his right arm was pushed aside, and the bullet went wide of its intended mark. The negro, who was scurrying across the garden to the westward,

continued on his course. His one thought was the Union camp.

Dave turned around, a scowl upon his face. George Knight was beside him. He it was who had jostled the arm of the outlaw.

"What are you doing?" shouted the latter, adding some language that would not bear printing.

"I didn't want you to commit murder," said the boy, very calmly. He had, of course, seen Dave leave his game of cards, and knew that the man had suspicions that Chloe was interviewing some one in the kitchen. So, after an interval of doubt, he had brushed past Charlie, hobbled into the kitchen, and diverted the aim of Dave just in the nick of time. Charlie was behind him in a flash, but misunderstanding the intent of the prisoner, he was not quick enough to prevent his interference with the shot of the other outlaw.

Dave glared at George. "There's some plotting going on here!" he declared. And turning his pistol upon the boy he added: "I've a great mind to put this into your heart!"

George stood very still, and stared bravely into

the eyes of his captor. "Go ahead," he said, "I'm not afraid."

Charlie went up to Dave, and put an arm upon his shoulder. "Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg," he observed, placing a new meaning on the old proverb. "Remember that General Thomas may give twenty thousand dollars for a live boy, but he won't give twenty farthings for a dead one."

George could not help shuddering. "They speak of me as if I were cattle," he thought.

Dave replaced his revolver in his belt. "You're right, Charlie," he answered. "There is no use in getting rid of a good thing; I'll let this chick live. But I must know who that darky is, and what he was doing here. Come, you old mountain of human flesh, tell me, or this house will be without a cook in two shakes of a sheep's tail!"

"Befo' de light," cried Chloe, coming straight up in front of Dave, with her arms akimbo, "I'se gwine to tell you only de truth, de whole truth and nuffin' but de truth." There was such an expression of dusky innocence in her glistening face that George waxed nervous. If she told

of Chesapeake Maryland's mission, and thus put the outlaws on their guard, the last hope of rescue would be gone.

"See that you do tell the truth, and the whole truth," commanded Dave sternly, as he recocked his pistol.

"Dat niggah was ma son, Ches'peake Maryland, an' he lives not far from here," explained the cook.

The boy groaned in spirit. "She's going to save herself by telling everything," he thought. But he had misjudged her, for she continued: "He's been visitin' me to borrow money from me, but you frightened him away. That coon is always tryin' to wheedle a dollar out of his pooh ole mammy."

"That fellow may be your son," said her inquisitor, "but I don't believe the rest of the story. You and he were up to some mischief." He felt instinctively that the visit of the negro had a deeper significance than the asking for money, although, of course, he could not guess what it really meant.

"Cross my heart, I'm telling ye de truth," replied Chloe, with an apparent sincerity that

might easily have deceived a great many persons.

"Cross your heart, will you?" cried Dave, looking very savage. "I'll do something to your heart with this pistol if you don't tell me everything in exactly one minute."

He pointed his revolver at her as he spoke, so that the muzzle was within a few inches of her bosom.

George rushed forward to interfere, heedless of consequences, but was at once caught by Charlie. "Look here, boy," he growled, pushing him back against the wall, "keep out of this affair. We've had enough of your interference!"

"Are you ready?" asked Dave, who was trying hard to frighten Chloe into a confession.

"Yeas, I'se ready!" cried the woman. Quick as a flash she struck the pistol out of Dave's hand, and then, as it went rattling on the floor, gave him a blow under the belt that sent him spinning across the room and almost landed him on the blazing hearth.

Charlie, astounded and almost stupefied by the suddenness of this action, relinquished his hold upon George, who, springing forward, seized the pistol from the floor. As he straightened him-

self up again, while a pain darted through his wounded leg, he beheld Chloe standing very quietly in the centre of the room. In one hand was a long knife which she had evidently extracted from under her bodice. "Come on, gemmin," she observed. "Ole Chloe is ready!" And she looked it.

Charlie now recovered sufficiently from his surprise to run forward and pick up his companion. The latter seemed stunned; his face was pale; it was plain that Chloe had delivered a "knockout" blow of which a young athlete might have been proud.

"Are you all right?" asked Charlie.

"All right?" snarled the other. "All right, after being pounded by a great fat ox like that woman? I feel as if I hadn't any stomach left."

He glared at Chloe, who maintained her position as before, and exchanged a triumphant glance with George. Then Dave's face grew paler than before, and he sat down upon a chair and leaned his head on the kitchen table. After remaining in that interesting position for several minutes he rose to his feet.

"Feel better now?" asked Charlie.

"Yes," he grunted. "Where's my revolver?"

"I have it," said George, with a pleased ring in his voice, "and I am going to hand it over to Chloe. She may need it to defend herself against such a rascal as you." He knew that for a minute or two he was master of the situation, and, none the less so, because Charlie's pistol was reposing on the card-room mantel-shelf instead of in his belt.

"Here, Chloe," continued the boy, handing her the weapon; "just keep that."

Chloe replaced the knife under her dress and took the pistol. "Thanks, honey," she said; "you're de salt o' de earth!"

"Now, my gentlemen," ordered George, "if you'll be kind enough to go back to your game of cards I'll just stay here with your cook. You needn't bother about me. I can't run away from here with this leg of mine. But I prefer to remain with her, to see that you don't revenge yourself on her."

He crossed to the door, and changed the key from the outside to the inner side of the lock. Charlie looked at the boy as if he had some intention of making a spring at him. But, as he

caught the eye of Chloe, who was fingering the revolver, he ended by taking the exhausted Dave by the arm and leading him from the kitchen. George now closed the door, locking it on the inside, and returned to where the old woman was standing. "Chloe," he said, "you're the finest woman in Tennessee!"

Chloe showed her white teeth, and her big lips broadened into an enormous smile. "Ole Chloe ain't no spring chicken to be fooled by de first man as comes into de barnyard," she said. "But, oh, honey boy, I'se afraid you've got yourn own self into a scrape, and de Lord only knows what Kearfoot'll do to you when he comes home an' de two here tells him how you defied 'em."

"Pshaw!" answered George. "All Kearfoot cares about is that ransom. And he would forfeit that by harming me." He spoke confidently, but down in his heart was the fear that Kearfoot would be furious at both himself and Chloe. "Never mind," he thought; "Chesapeake Maryland is safe on his way to General Thomas."

Chloe now began her preparations for dinner

as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened. She eventually produced a meal that diffused such an appetizing odor that George became ravenously hungry.

"You had better let me take the dishes in to Dave and Charlie, so they can't do you any ill-turn," said George, in a tone of command. He was resolved that nothing should happen to the faithful negress, if he could prevent it.

"Take dis good hash, dis corn-cake, dese eggs, dis soup—in to dem rascalmuffins? Not a bit o' it, massa! Do ye think old Chloe is gwine to feed dem? No! Dis dinner is fo' you, honey, and fo' Chloe."

So saying the cook served the dinner on the kitchen table, and invited George to "eat omniferous," as she expressed it. The boy, in the fulness of his heart, asked her to sit down at table with him, but Chloe, who knew her position and the conventionalities of life, politely nodded her head in the negative. "No niggah should set down at de same table with a white gemmin," she said, speaking with the air of an oracle. So George sat down alone, perhaps not unwillingly, and did ample justice to a meal

that was deliciously cooked; for Chloe prided herself, not wrongly, upon being one of the best cooks in the whole South.

"Chloe," said the boy, after he had finished his repast, and risen from the table, "now it's your turn."

The old woman seated herself at the board, made an ineffectual attempt to swallow two or three mouthfuls, and then, giving up the task as an impossibility, rose to her feet.

"I can't eat, honey," she announced. "I'se too worried."

"Worried, Chloe? About what?"

"About you, honey. S'posin' dat dere General Thomas won' ranscom you? What den?"

"Why, Chloe, do you forget about Chesapeake Maryland?"

"No, massa, but ef Kearfoot come back soon, and say General Thomas won't ranscom ye, and Ches'peake Maryland ain't got to Thomas yet, then Kearfoot may—bress de Lord, I doan like to think! I doan want to think what he may do."

"Now don't borrow trouble," suggested George. He could not but see the force of

Chloe's argument, but he had no intention of showing her that he had the slightest misgivings as to the result of this whole adventure.

Just at this juncture there came a knock at the door leading from the hallway. George seized Dave's pistol, which Chloe had placed upon the dresser, and went to the door. "Who's there?" he asked. "I—Charlie Dowling," came the answer.

"What d'ye want?" asked George. To which Charlie returned: "I'm as hungry as a bay steer, and I want some dinner. Didn't I smell it all across the hallway?"

"Doan give him a thing, honey," said old Chloe. "He doan deserve nuffin'!"

But George, who always revelled in the healthiest sort of appetite, had great sympathy for any hungry man. "Are you up to any mischief there?" he demanded. "Where's Dave?"

"I ain't up to any mischief," replied Charlie. "Dave is in the card-room, and his stomach ails him so that he couldn't eat a thing, not even if it was forced down his throat with a crowbar. But I'm dead starving,—I am. And my pistol's with Dave."

George cautiously opened the door, and ushered the famished Charlie into the kitchen. He held the pistol in his hand as the outlaw entered, but it was quite evident that Charlie was, for the present at least, innocent of any idea of slaughter. Upon a motion from George he sat down at the table and quickly devoured what was left of Chloe's dinner. He evidently had no false ideas of propriety upon the subject.

Chloe, however, was furious that this man, one of George's enemies, should be enjoying himself to this extent. When Charlie had finished she glowered upon him and indicated, with very forcible expressions, that his absence was more desirable than his presence.

"All right, old girl," he said, "I'm glad enough to go now that I've eaten your food. It wasn't your society I wanted; it was your cooking." He left the kitchen, and George heard him cross the hall, and return to the card-room. As the outlaw opened the door of the latter a groan from Dave could be distinctly heard in the kitchen. "I'll tell you one thing," said George, staring at Chloe with a funny twinkle in

his eye, and placing the pistol on the dresser; "you can knock out a grown man all right."

"For de wicked shall perish from de face o' de earth," answered Chloe. Her mood seemed suddenly to change. She seized a copy of the New Testament from the dresser, and pretended to read texts therefrom; but, as she held the book upside down, it was evident that she could not read. From quoting texts she burst into song, giving vent, with much fervor and rolling of eyes, to old plantation hymns. At last she sank down on a chair by the fire, and fell fast asleep.

The minutes went on, as Chloe slept, and, rousing herself occasionally, slept again. George stalked the floor of the kitchen like a caged lion. He was restless, and nervous, wondering what would be the outcome of the day. Dave and Charlie made no move to interfere with him in any way. It was evident that Dave had been rendered *hors de combat* by the heavy fist of the cook. Once Charlie crossed the hallway, to knock at the door of the kitchen. "Let me in, only for one minute," he cried. "I haven't any firearms with me. I only want to get a cup of

hot water for Dave. He thinks it will do his stomach good."

George took a cup from the dresser and poured into it some hot water from a kettle hanging above the fire. He handed it out of the door, very cautiously, and turned the lock. Had the outlaw made the slightest move he was ready to slam the door in his face. But Charlie had no such intention. He was quite demoralized by the accident to his companion. He meekly departed to the card-room, where several groans suggested to the boy that Dave must be imbibing the hot water. During these proceedings Chloe had roused from her slumbers, to look at George's good offices in a disapproving way, for she never could see the philosophy of being kind to one's enemies, and then relaxed again into pleasant slumber. Thus time dragged on and on.

It must have been about half-past three o'clock in the afternoon when George thought he heard the sound of approaching horsemen. He listened, and finally he could distinguish the unmistakable tread of horses' feet over soft earth. A wild hope seized him. Could this be a company of cavalry sent to rescue him by General Thomas,

at the instigation of Chesapeake Maryland? But his anticipations were soon dashed to the ground. He heard the unwelcome voice of Kearfoot. "Whoa, you beast," he was saying to his horse.

Chloe sprang to her feet. "There come dose devils!" she cried, with more truth than politeness. "Now, honey, our troubles will begin."

The horsemen, who were unmistakably Kearfoot and the three companions who had ridden off with him in the morning, drew up at the door of the house. The leader dismounted, after handing his horse over to one of the outlaws, and entered the mansion, to be joined, in a short time, by the others, who had placed their animals in the barn. George could hear them all talking in the card-room to Charlie and the invalided Dave. He longed to know whether Kearfoot had penetrated the Union lines, and, if so, what the result had been.

Louder and louder grew the voices in the card-room, and loudest of them all, as if in angry protest, was that of Kearfoot. Once George heard him say, "This is what comes of leaving

the boy and the woman under guard of two fools!"

Finally the leader, followed by all his companions excepting the incapacitated Dave, strode out of the room, into the hallway. He knocked in a peremptory manner at the door of the kitchen, after trying it and finding that it was locked from the inside. "Let me in, boy," he cried. But the "boy" was in no hurry to do anything of the kind. "If I let you in," he called, "what do you intend doing with Chloe and me?"

"None of your business," shouted Kearfoot, who was evidently in a violent temper and a desperate mood. Indeed, when Dave and Charlie had related to him the presence and disappearance of Chesapeake Maryland he began to fear that some communication with the Union camp was being attempted.

"I think I won't let you in for the present," said George, in a very placid tone. He gave Chloe, who was now standing by him, a reassuring glance. For once in her life she seemed frightened; she knew the reckless character of the men behind the door.

The latter held a hurried consultation, in whis-

pers. George could not hear what was said, for the door was a thick, old-fashioned one of mahogany, and therefore well calculated to interfere with eavesdroppers. When the whispering ceased the men seemed to separate, two moving towards the back door of the hall and the others to the front door.

Chloe, her eyes dilating, seized George by the arm. "Honey," she said, "doan you see what they's be gwine to do? Go outside and shoot at us thro' de windows."

"Quick!" cried George. "The shutters!" He hobbled over the floor, pulled in, and bolted the back shutters, while the negress did the same with the side shutters. They were not a minute too soon, for as the last bolt was put in place they could hear the men outside the kitchen. They could hear, too, a murmur of surprise. "The boy was too smart for us," said Charlie. To which Kearfoot made some reply in an undertone. Meanwhile Chloe had lighted a lamp upon the dresser, for the closing of the shutters had made the room dreary enough, save for the fire.

"I feel as if I were in prison," said George,

trying to appear more cheerful than he really felt.

"So we be, honey, so we be," answered Chloe, dolefully. "Dat Kearfoot means us harm."

"What kind of harm, Chloe?"

"De worst kind—death."

CHAPTER IX

AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

"I THINK you fear too much," said George, rather to reassure the old woman than because he felt any real belief in his words.

"I knows what I'se talkin' 'bout," reiterated Chloe, "an' I knows dis Kearfoot, too. He's got no feelin' where feelin's owt to be, an' dere's a flint where his heart should be. Didn't I see him t' other day shoot his setter jes' 'cause the dog ran away from him? Any man as could do dat could do anything. Ole Chloe'll never forget de look in de eyes o' the poor beast as it lay a-dyin'."

George could not help giving a little start. If Chloe kept on in this melancholy strain he would soon lose his nerve. As it was, the exciting effects of the day were beginning to tell upon him. He felt tired, both mentally and physically.

Soon the outlaws returned to the hallway, through the back door. Kearfoot now knocked at the kitchen door. "Knight," he said, "we are

going to break in this door, if we can't get in any other way."

"And if you do," answered George, "I'll fire the pistol that I have here at the first man who enters the kitchen."

Kearfoot laughed, in a scornful way. "Listen to a little cold reasoning," he said, speaking very loud. "If you try your pistol at us you can shoot only one man, whereas we will each have a drop on you; and if one bullet doesn't do you up, another surely will."

George could not help seeing the brutal force of this argument. After all, it came down to the fact that he was one against five or six.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Open the door and let us in," said the leader. "Save us trouble, and save yourself your own life."

"You'd better do it, honey," advised Chloe. She was fearful that if the door should be broken in the boy would become the target of every man outside.

George realized that it would be easy enough for the men to force the lock and enter the

kitchen. So he did not long hesitate as to his course. He turned the key halfway in the lock, and asked: "If I let you in will you keep your revolvers in your belts or your pockets?"

"Yes," answered Kearfoot. The boy completed the turning of the key, opened the door, and the six men, for they had now been joined by Dave, looking still very pale, rushed into the room. They held their revolvers in their hands, despite their promises, and Dave, to replace the one taken by George, had supplied himself with a carbine which he proceeded to point at the lad.

But Kearfoot tore forward, hit the carbine a blow that sent it reeling out of Dave's hand, and cried: "You fool, this isn't your funeral. I am running things here!"

Dave picked up his weapon, sheepishly enough, and made no further attempt to take revenge on his adversary. But he contented himself by casting malicious glances at Chloe, whom he could not forgive for having knocked him out in such effective fashion. He still felt the results.

"Here, woman," commanded the leader, "throw open the shutters. The room is stifling." Chloe

did as she was bid, and extinguished the light upon the dresser.

Kearfoot seated himself upon the kitchen table, with his companions grouped about the room. George stood opposite to him, with calm expression and fearless pose. Chloe sat down near the fireplace.

"Well, well," observed Kearfoot, a sarcastic inflection in his harsh voice; "I hear you've been amusing yourself mightily since I went away this morning. You are a bright youth, you are."

"Thank you," replied George, bowing with mock humility. "May I ask you what success you had with General Thomas?"

"General Thomas will give me a reply to-morrow," snarled Kearfoot. "But that's not what I am here for. I want to know, my precious young man, what plot you and Chloe have been concocting?"

"I'se willing to swear ——" cried the negress, jumping to her feet, and anxious to throw the outlaw off the track by a denial.

"Hold your tongue, and sit down, you nigger!" said Kearfoot. And Chloe meekly obeyed. "I'm not talking to *you*." He turned to George. "I

hear that a negro has been here, and escaped, after having had a talk with Chloe. What are you or she trying to do? Send information to Thomas?"

The man had struck the mark so truly that for a second George was nonplused. But he quickly recovered himself. "You attach a great deal of unnecessary importance to the chance visit of a colored man," he interposed.

"Come, my boy, don't argue," went on Kearfoot. "If that negro had been perfectly innocent he wouldn't have taken to the woods in the quick way he did. There's something up, and I must know what it is!"

George smiled. "You have a very vivid imagination," he answered. "You must excuse me if I can't swear that what you think is really true."

Kearfoot jumped from the table and put a hand menacingly upon the boy's shoulder. "You're a pretty smart fellow, for your age," he said, "but you can't pull the blinds over my eyes. I want to get at the bottom of this little conspiracy. I'll give you exactly half an hour"—here he looked at the clock hanging on the wall above

the dresser—"and if by that time you don't choose to make a full confession I'll send you and Chloe out to the barn, and have you both shot! My only regret is that I left you in charge of two such idiotic fools as Dave and Charlie!"

The two "idiotic fools" hung their heads. This was not their lucky day.

The leader and the lad gazed at each other steadfastly. It seemed as if the former wanted to read the very soul of the latter. But so far he had been unsuccessful.

"I have nothing to say," said George, after a pause. "And if you keep me here until doomsday I will have nothing to say!"

"Very pretty," sneered Kearfoot. "Perhaps you'll change your mind in half an hour from now. Boys, one of you go down to the stable and get some rope. Quick now."

"Are you going to hang us?" asked the boy. "I thought we were to be shot?" He believed that Kearfoot was trying to bully him into a confession, but he was not so sure that his failure to confess might not be rewarded by the threatened death.

"Don't worry," answered the outlaw. "You won't hang, even though you do happen to be a spy!"

In the meantime Charlie had trotted off to the barn, only too glad to make himself useful to his disgusted commander, and to obtain the desired rope. Whilst he was gone, not a word was spoken by any one in the kitchen, nor was a sound heard save the ticking of the clock. "Click, clock, click, clock," it went, as if it were measuring out the last few minutes that poor George and the faithful Chloe were to live.

In a little while, that is to say, in three or four minutes, Charlie returned to the kitchen, bearing a coil of small rope, of the thickness of the kind used for a clothes-line.

"Bind up the boy and the woman, with their arms behind them," ordered Kearfoot; "tie their feet, too, and set them on the floor. Be careful not to hurt the boy's wounded leg, though, when you do it."

George could not help marveling at the contradictory character of his enemy. Here was a man who, in one breath, threatened him with death, and, in another, directed that his wounded

leg be spared any pain. Perhaps it was that the physician cropped out now and then, even in the desperado.

It did not take long for the men to bind the two prisoners in the manner requested, and place them, side by side, on the floor near the fireplace. George offered no resistance; he knew that to do so would be madness. When this work was concluded Kearfoot said: "Come, fellows, we'll leave these two to their thoughts. They can't do any mischief now. If in, well,—he looked once more at the clock,—"I'll still give you half an hour, though you don't deserve it. If, at the end of that time, neither of you confesses, you know what's in store for you! Come, fellows!"

The leader left the kitchen, accompanied by his followers, and returned to the card-room. He was angry, suspicious, ill at ease. He had hoped to frighten the two prisoners into the admission that they were attempting to communicate with the Federal camp at Murfreesboro—a thing which, if it were the case, it was very essential for him to know. For, if Rosecrans or Thomas had been warned of George's whereabouts by

the mysterious negro, an attack from troops might be apprehended, and, in that case, it behooved the outlaws to disappear from the house into the woods in short order. And what would he do if George and Chloe refused to confess? He hardly knew himself. He had not abandoned all hopes of that ransom. But if the boy angered him by remaining silent—he might carry out his threat.

George's thoughts, as he sat, in his bonds, near old Chloe, were as bitter as they were contradictory. He knew that if he did not make a full confession he and the negress would, in all likelihood, meet the fate that was threatened them. Yet if, on the other hand, he made a clean breast of things, and acknowledged that Chesapeake Maryland had gone to the Union camp, what would these "non-partisan guerrillas" do with him? Would they spirit him away to some safer place, or would they, in their rage, shoot him and Chloe, in order to get rid of them?

"Chloe," he said, "we are in a tight place." He looked at the kitchen clock as he spoke; already five minutes of precious time had gone by.

The old woman was rocking herself backward and forward, and muttering what sounded like some "Voodoo" incantation—a relic of the days when the ancestors of the Southern slaves were deep in the mysteries of African witchcraft and paganism. "I doan care fo' myself," she moaned; "I'se an ole woman, and death would come to poor Chloe soon enough anyway, but I'se sorry for you, ma honey. You is too young to be shot! Glory, glory! Hallelujah!"

"If I tell them the truth—if I tell them that Chloe got Chesapeake Maryland to go to General Thomas," thought the boy, "they will probably shoot her anyway, even if they preserve me in the hope of that ransom."

This thought decided him to say nothing. He was determined that whatever might happen to him, he would not endanger the life of the negress. She had behaved like a heroine—nay, like half a dozen heroines—in order to shield him, and he would rather die than utter one word which might be the means of jeopardizing her. If they put her to death without a confession from either of them, he would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that it had been

through no fault, through no false confidence, of his own.

The minutes flew on, as they always do when we want the time to go more slowly. At last the clock pointed to the moment when his fate was to be decided. Hardly had the hand passed that point when Kearfoot and his companions came back into the kitchen.

"Have you two made up your minds to be sensible and make a clear breast of things?" he asked, in a plausible voice.

Chloe shook her head in the negative. The leader stared hard and eagerly at George. "I'll try to gain a little time," thought the latter. So he said aloud: "I'd like to have a talk with you alone."

Kearfoot stamped his foot impatiently. "There's no time for a talk," he exclaimed. "Tell me, now or never!"

"Listen!" cried Chloe. "Some one's coming." Every one started; a dead silence prevailed in the room. It was broken by the leader. "You're crazy," he said to the old woman. "I don't hear a thing, except the cackling of some geese outside."

Chloe shook her head. "These ain't no geese," she answered. "Listen! Horses!" She fairly shrieked the last word in her excitement.

"Hush!" thundered Kearfoot. He listened intently for half a minute, after throwing open the door leading into the hallway. "By the Lord Harry, she's right!" he said, with an air of half-suppressed rage.

George could now hear what the more sensitive ears of the negress had already detected. The gallop of horses' feet—not a walk, but a gallop—came nearer and nearer the house. His heart leaped with delight. "At last!" he thought. "Chesapeake Maryland got to camp!"

"You hound!" shouted Kearfoot, his wicked eyes all aflame. "This is some of your work and that nigger's! You have brought the Yankees down upon us!"

George laughed in a provoking way. "Perhaps it is only a few friends coming to spend the night with you," he said.

"I'll get even with you yet," hissed the outlaw. He was about to make a spring at the boy, as if about to strike him on the head with the butt

end of his revolver, when Charlie pushed him back. "Don't bother with the boy now; you've got to save us. They are coming through the woods."

Kearfoot paused, and then ran into the hall. "Those are cavalrymen," he said; "I can hear the clinking of sabers!" Though the cavalcade was, perhaps, still a quarter of a mile away the metallic din of steel could be easily heard.

"What are we to do?" asked the men, all in one breath.

For a minute Kearfoot had lost his customary presence of mind. But now he regained it, and he gave his orders with the quickness and precision of a hard-pressed but resourceful general.

"There's no chance for us to get away from here now," he said, "and if we shut ourselves up in the house to stand siege the soldiers will only stay here till they starve us out. I'm going to try a little strategy, instead."

"Strategy?" echoed his companions.

"Yes, strategy. You men will stay here with the two prisoners—all of you except Charlie who is to come with me to the front door. He will stand on the steps, while I will walk down the

roadway with a flag of truce to meet them." Here he pulled a large napkin from the kitchen table. "I shall tell them that if they come another step to capture us, George Knight's life will be the penalty. Charlie, if I turn and wave my hand to you, run back to the kitchen here and have my order carried out. Let the boy be shot! If the soldiers consent to go away, or to pay ransom for him, don't harm him."

"I don't care what you do to me," said George, "if you'll only untie these ropes. My arms and legs are stiff."

"Untie both the prisoners," ordered Kearfoot, "but watch them well." Without more ado he and Charlie left the room. George and Chloe were immediately unbound, much to their relief, and allowed to sit down on chairs, whilst their guardians, having shut and locked the door, watched over them with their pistols.

"Humph!" said Dave, in accents of admiration, "Kearfoot is the champion bluffer."

"Will this bluff work?" asked George. His nerve had all returned to him. He no longer felt tired; he was once more buoyed up by the excitement of a new and precarious situation.

"If the bluff doesn't work," answered Dave, quite as if he were discussing the killing of a chicken or something equally inconsequential, "it will be because your companions in the Union army would rather capture us than save your life."

"Glory, glory!" shouted Chloe suddenly. "Oh, dis be a wicked world!"

What was happening outside this gloomy house? When Kearfoot walked out of the kitchen he left Charlie stationed on the front door steps, whilst he strode down the pathway almost to the end of the clearing. In front of him was the road through the dense woods. Through it were coming, two abreast, a long line of horsemen. Just how many of them it was impossible to tell. He thought there must be over two hundred of them, nor was he far wrong in this estimate.

But there was no more time for thinking. Already had the first two horsemen, one of them wearing the uniform of a major of cavalry, arrived at the very edge of the clearing.

Kearfoot waved the napkin which he had

brought from the kitchen table. "A truce! a truce!" he cried.

The Major and his companion, evidently a young lieutenant, reined in their horses, and the line behind them gradually came to a standstill.

"Who in creation are you?" demanded the Major savagely. He was big and black bearded, and looked like a man who was not to be trifled with.

"I am Kearfoot, leader of the guerrillas, who have charge of young Knight," began Kearfoot, coolly. "Do you see that man standing on the door step of the house? Well, if you fellows advance a step farther he will give a signal to others inside the house, and the boy will be dead before you can say 'Jack Robinson'! So if you want him to live I advise you to go straight back to camp, and tell General Thomas I am waiting for that twenty thousand dollars of ransom."

The Major looked at the young lieutenant, and then back again at the leader of the outlaws. He had seen much service, but never had he had to encounter any but an honorable enemy. And here was a scoundrel whose effrontery was only

equaled by his Mephistophelian ingenuity. Here were two hundred and forty well-armed cavalrymen ready to seize six men, yet they were being held at bay by the strategy of one of the six. The Major regarded him with an expression wherein contempt for his rascality was not unmingled with a sarcastic admiration of his cleverness.

"By George," he said, "you are magnificent!"

Kearfoot pulled off his hat and bowed low, in mock courtesy. "You do me too much honor," he answered. "But let us avoid compliments. What do you intend to do?"

It must be confessed that the question was something of a poser to the Major, who had been entirely unprepared for such a *dénouement* as the present one. He had expected to rush in and save George Knight; not to be met upon the threshold of the house by such a tragic dilemma as the one advanced by Kearfoot.

"If you will withdraw, and let me have a consultation with several of the officers," said the Major at last, "I will tell you later what my line of action will be."

Kearfoot hesitated. "If I do withdraw," he

replied, "I will go only as far as the front steps of the house, and you must not advance your men any farther than you are now."

"I must have some talk with my officers to decide as to whether I accept your proposal or not," retorted the officer, "and, if I do that, I must get them out here into the clearing."

"Well, you and three or four others may come out into the clearing," assented the leader of the outlaws, "but the rest must stay in the roadway."

"All right," returned the Major. "That will do."

Kearfoot retreated, with his face to the enemy, towards the door step upon which Charlie stood.

"You were too smart for the Yankees," said Charlie, admiringly.

"I rather think I have the better of them," observed Kearfoot, placing his hat on his head. "They are in a quandary."

Meanwhile the Major, whose name was Smethurst, had drawn several other officers out into the clearing, including the young lieutenant already referred to, two captains of cavalry, somewhat older, and an adjutant, a grizzly,

white-moustached fellow who looked as if he might have seen many a year's service out on the plains, among the Indians.

"We have a devil to deal with," said Major Smethurst, and he explained to them the threat of Kearfoot.

"Let's storm the place at once," suggested the young lieutenant, whose one idea always was, "fight, fight early, fight often, fight at once."

The grizzly adjutant laughed in a good-natured way. "That's like a boy," he said. "Don't you understand that the first defensive move we make will be followed by the killing—I mean by the murdering—of George Knight? And don't you understand, also, that if we did anything to put the boy's life in jeopardy, and he fell a victim, General Thomas never would forgive us?"

"You're right," said the Major; "if anything is accomplished here it must be by diplomacy. Don't let us do anything that may endanger young Knight's life. General Thomas dotes on the lad, and even I, although I've seen very little of him, would be the last person on earth to bring him any harm through my recklessness."

The young lieutenant hung his head. "I didn't weigh the consequences," he explained. "I want to see Knight's life saved under any circumstances. I know him, like him, and would do all I could to save him."

Every one in the council agreed in this sentiment. "Well," said Major Smethurst, "we are all agreed that under no circumstances must we compromise Knight. But is there any way that we can avoid doing that and yet get ahead of these wretched outlaws?"

"How many of these guerrillas are there?" asked one of the cavalry captains.

"That negro, Chesapeake Maryland—he's back of the lines somewhere—says there are six," answered Smethurst. "Just to think. We are over two hundred strong, yet we are kept at bay by the ingenuity of one desperado who ties up our hands and practically defies us."

The adjutant patted his horse on the neck and said: "There's only one way to beat this outlaw, and that is by his own weapons. He has fought us with diplomacy rather than arms. Let us conquer him, too, by diplomacy."

"How?" asked the young lieutenant.

The adjutant began to whisper, and the other officers leaned forward on their horses to drink in his words. When he had finished there was a murmur of approval from the rest. "Good," said the Major. "There's a Roland for an Oliver. We'll win the day yet, thanks to you." And the adjutant flushed crimson. It was the proudest day in his life.

Kearfoot here came back from the steps and confronted the officers in council. "Gentlemen," he said, looking at them with a malevolent leer on his countenance, "don't you think that I've given you enough time to deliberate?"

"Yes, plenty of time," returned Major Smethurst. "And all we now want is to ask a question of you."

"Fire away, but don't be too long about it," retorted the outlaw. He was disposed to be dictatorial; he felt that he commanded the entire situation.

"You have been too smart for us," said the Major. "I confess it, unwillingly enough." Here Kearfoot's eyes gleamed triumphantly. "So the only thing to do is to ransom the boy. I will take all my men back to camp, procure the

money, and return here myself with it. How does that suit your Royal Highness?"

"First-rate," said Kearfoot. "I thought I'd get my money's worth out of the boy." The prospect of securing the twenty thousand dollars, and of dividing it as much in his own favor as possible, imparted a bright if hardly pleasant smile to his fat countenance.

Smethurst was studying that countenance intently, and he saw the greedy joy of its expression.

"But you get the ransom on one condition; if you won't agree to that," he said, "we ride away and leave the boy to you."

"What is the condition?" asked Kearfoot.

"I must have five minutes' private conversation with Knight, away from any of your men and free from their intimidation. I must go with him alone into a room in your house. The cavalry will remain here with orders to come no nearer the house. If they venture to disobey me—well, I am alone, in your power,—but they will not hazard my life by doing anything of the kind."

"What do you want to say to the boy?"

"It's a matter concerning him and General Thomas."

"Why can't it wait until the boy is back in camp?"

"Oh, if you won't allow it," said the Major, "you may lose your money. I can't see why you should object, anyway. I will be in your house unarmed, and entirely at your mercy. I am taking all the risk, you none." As he spoke the officer handed over his sword and pistols to the young lieutenant, to show that he would enter the house without a weapon. "All you have to do is to put George Knight and myself in a room together, shut the door on us, and there you have us in your power. If you think we will try any tricks, like jumping out of the window, why then put us in the second story, or in the attic."

Kearfoot hesitated. Why did the officer want to speak to the boy? Still, there seemed no danger. The officer was taking the risks, not himself, and there was the chance of the twenty thousand dollars; or rather the certainty of it if he allowed this interview. The thought of the gold decided him.

"You can do it," he announced. "Only no treachery. If any of your men come any nearer the house while your are in it your life will pay for it, my friend."

"That's understood," said the Major. And addressing his officers, he ordered them, in the most imperative tones, to remain where they were, and to keep the troops behind them at a halt. "Otherwise," he added solemnly, "you will be responsible for the death of your Major." He dismounted, turning his horse over to the adjutant, and walked up to the steps of the mansion, accompanied by the outlaw.

"God bless him," said the adjutant, solemnly. "May the trick succeed." His brother officers received this wish with a fervent "Amen!" Smethurst was taking big risks, nor were they ignorant of the fact.

"The boy is in the kitchen," exclaimed Kearfoot, as they stood, with the surprised Charlie, who did not understand the officer's presence, well within the doorway.

The Major halted. "One thing must be thoroughly understood before we go any farther," he said. "I don't propose to talk to Knight in a

room on the ground-floor, where any of your men can shoot at me through a window if they feel gay."

"I'll order them to let you alone," answered the leader.

"If it's all the same to you, I'd prefer an upper room, thank you."

"Very well; it makes no difference to me," returned Kearfoot. He thought that the Major was suddenly growing nervous. "Charlie," he said, "take this officer up to the room in which George Knight slept last night. I'll bring the boy up myself."

Charlie conducted Smethurst up the staircase and ushered him into the room which George had occupied.

"This apartment is not sumptuously furnished," remarked the Major, satirically, as he glanced critically around him. For some reason the room, shabby as it was, seemed to afford him more interest than any one could have expected.

Charlie smiled. "If we get twenty thousand dollars out of you fellows," he observed, "we'll put in better furniture, and invite you to stop with us."

There was the sound of footsteps on the stairs. In another minute George hobbled into the room, guarded by Kearfoot and Dave. When the lad saw a Union Cavalry Major before him he gave an exclamation of surprise and delight. It was good to see the old uniform again. But it suddenly came over him that the man might be a prisoner. "I hope you haven't been captured?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it," laughed the officer. "I am Major Smethurst, of the ——th Cavalry, and I've something to say to you of importance. After I've talked to you, I'm going back to camp to secure your ransom."

George fairly gasped in wonderment. What did all this mean?

The Major turned to Kearfoot. "If you will leave me alone with the boy for not over five minutes, and shut the door—lock it, if you want —I'll be ready to return to Murfreesboro."

Kearfoot went up to the officer and proceeded carefully to feel his clothing, in order to see if he had any weapon concealed about his person. After satisfying himself, apparently, that the Major was harmless in this respect, he ordered

Charlie and Dave to leave the room. They hurried out into the hallway and Kearfoot followed. "In five minutes," he said, "I shall open the door." The Major bowed acquiescence. Then the leader of the guerrillas shut the door, and took the precaution of locking it from the outside.

As the key turned in the lock Smethurst walked up to George. "Come away from the door," he whispered. They walked over towards the fireplace, which was now cold and empty of wood. "My coming here," went on the Major, "is a trick, a piece of strategy." He explained the clever scheme of the outlaw leader, which had practically rendered useless the expedition in rescue of the boy, and added: "So we had to meet strategy with strategy. But there's not time now to explain our scheme. Will you put yourself entirely in my hands, and trust me blindly?"

"Indeed I will," whispered George. "Do what you will with me."

"Good," answered Smethurst. "If we are to succeed in this enterprise, it's necessary that we be able to secure that door yonder against being

opened by these desperadoes, only for one minute. Give me one minute's time to keep them out and victory is ours!"

"I don't understand," replied George. He confesssed that he was bewildered.

"I must give a signal which will be a whistle from one of these windows," the officer explained, as he pointed to a window in the front of the room, looking out in the direction of the troops. "Indeed, it was agreed that a shrill, penetrating whistle from any window in any part of the house should be the signal. Now between that signal and the appearance here, in this hallway, of my troops will take exactly a minute. During the course of that minute it is necessary that we should protect ourselves against the rascals outside in the hallway. Otherwise they will rush in and kill us, which won't be exactly jolly. Do you understand me now?"

"Thoroughly," answered the boy. He saw that one minute's possession of the room would give the Union cavalrymen time to capture all the outlaws. It was an ingenious scheme. "I understand perfectly," he continued. "While the row with the cavalry is going on we will be

safe from the vengeance of Kearfoot. But how to keep the door closed? Shall we move the bureau against it, or the bedstead?"

"Don't bother to do either," said Smethurst, in a confident way that was enough to reassure the most wavering mind. "As long as your chief captor has been kind enough to lock the door let us take advantage of the fact, and save ourselves from any unnecessary physical exercise."

He produced from a waistcoat pocket a small penknife. "I can run this in the keyhole," he explained in low tones, "and so work it around that no one on the outside can turn the key."

"By Jove," cried George, "that's a capital idea!"

Major Smethurst opened the knife and showed one of its two blades. "This will do the business," he said softly. He crept to the door, silently inserted the knife, and twisted it in such a way that it would be quite impossible to turn the key in the lock. "My boy," he went on, "you must stick to the door. You must keep the knife in its present position, while I give the signal."

George seized the handle of the knife, and kept its blade in the hole in the exact position indicated by the Major. He was just in time, for Kearfoot, hearing some slight noise at the door, ran forward in the hall and tried to turn the key. "What are you fellows up to?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Hold the knife," cautioned Smethurst. Then he ran to one of the front windows, which he opened, and gave utterance to a long, low but piercing whistle which might have been heard for half a mile at least.

He then closed the window and returned to George Knight. Kearfoot was pounding at the door, and making violent attempts to unlock it. But he could not turn the key. There was a mysterious obstruction which prevented him. "Let me in! let me in!" he cried.

"Come in yourself!" retorted the Major. "You have the key."

Kearfoot continued to rattle at the lock. "There's some funny game going on here," he said.

"Hark!" cried Dave. "I hear the soldiers!"

Kearfoot ran and looked out of the front

hall window. And as he gazed he grew white and then whiter. For the horsemen, hearing the whistle of their commander, had galloped, two by two, into the open space surrounding the house and were now gathering there in formidable array. Then a cheer rent the air. They felt that they were on the verge of triumph.

"Tricked!" shouted Kearfoot. "We are tricked!" As selfish in danger as in prosperity, the leader deserted his companions, and dashed up the stairway to the attic. He resolved to sell his life dearly. He opened a door, rushed into a room and turned the bolt. "Fool! fool that I was!" he cried. "How could I have let myself be duped in this way?"

In the meantime the cavalrymen were swarming into the house with cries of eager anticipation. Into the hallway, and thence through other rooms they rushed until some of them reached the kitchen, where they found three alarmed outlaws guarding poor old Chloe.

"Laws a mercy!" yelled Chloe, delighted yet frightened by this avalanche. "Don't kill me; I'se for the Union and Abe Lincoln! Glory! glory!"

But the invaders had no intention of killing the negress. They swooped down upon her three guards and made them prisoners almost before they understood what had happened.

Other cavalrymen, pouring up the stairway to the second story, came upon Dave and Charlie. These two they secured after the latter had fired off a revolver which, fortunately, missed its mark, so that the bullet spent itself in the wall of the hall.

"We are safe!" cried Major Smethurst, as George took the pen knife from the keyhole. "Here, boys, let us out!"

The soldiers, delighted to hear the voice of their commander, tore to the door of the bedroom. "Unlock the door!" shouted the boy. They instantly obeyed, and flocked into the apartment, crowding about the officer and the young aide. "Hurrah!" shouted the rescuers, and the two who were rescued joined in the glad cry.

Among the party was the adjutant. "Where's the leader of the guerrillas?" he asked excitedly.

"Up-stairs in the garret," replied George. He had heard Kearfoot mount to the third floor.

Up ran the adjutant to the garret, followed by perhaps twenty men. By this time the house was filled with soldiers, and all the outlaws save the leader were captives.

The adjutant and his followers ran through the garret, from room to room, until they reached one in the rear of the mansion. The door was locked. The adjutant pounded upon it. There was no answer. "Come out, man!" he shouted, all breathless by his exertions. Still no answer. By this time George and the Major had joined them.

"If you are in there, Kearfoot," called George, "you had better come out! You won't gain anything by staying here."

Still no answer. But the ears of the boy could detect the sound of some one moving around the room.

"Let us break down the door," the adjutant said. Then there came a voice from within. "I'll not keep you long," it said. It was the voice of Kearfoot. The next instant there was a loud report, and then a sound as of a body falling heavily upon the floor.

"Break down that door, I say!" cried the

adjutant. At once half a dozen soldiers pressed against the door with all their might. Suddenly it gave way with a crash, and the soldiers dashed into the room. But why describe what met their sight? Only let it be written that Kearfoot was lying dead, with a bullet in his head.

* * * * * *

Within another hour the cavalrymen were on their way to the camp at Murfreesboro. With them went the five outlaws, mounted on their own horses and strictly guarded. The body of Kearfoot had been hastily interred in a grave dug near the back of the house. But his horse had been useful, for upon its back were perched two dusky persons, one, old Chloe, and her companion none other than Chesapeake Maryland, who had ridden on from camp after the cavalry and arrived in time to witness the funeral of Kearfoot. The face of Chesapeake Maryland was wreathed in smiles. His appearance had been the cause of great enthusiasm among the soldiers, and when George explained what Chloe had done, and how bravely she had acted, she, too, came in for the warmest sort of praise.

As the troops left the woods the boy, who was astride a horse with Major Smethurst, got near the two negroes. "Chloe," he said, "you're a heroine—and your son, Chesapeake Maryland, is a hero."

Chloe was not sure what either hero or heroine might mean, but she knew that praise was intended, and answered quickly: "Ches'peake Maryland may be a lazy niggah, but I allus said he had brains." And Chesapeake Maryland laughed a self-satisfied laugh.

It was a joyous party which rode past the fortifications and into Murfreesboro,—all, at least, except the prisoners. Many were the cheers that rent the air as the cavalcade dashed through the camp up to General Thomas's headquarters. "Hurrah for George Knight!" "Three cheers for Our Boy!" and other cries of a similar nature brought a flush of embarrassment to George's cheek.

"You see how popular you are," said Major Smethurst. Whereat George only flushed the redder.

We can well imagine what cordial greetings the boy received from General Thomas. There

were tears in the latter's eyes as he embraced George with a warmth of manner that seemed very surprising in one whose behavior, as a rule, had about it something of coldness. Thomas had, in reality, as kind a heart as ever beat under a soldier's coat, and on rare occasions he could be demonstrative.

How intently interested he was, to be sure, when he listened to the recital of George's adventures, and how his face shone when Major Smethurst described the rescue of the lad.

"That was a glorious bit of strategy," cried the General. Nor was he wrong in his praise. The idea of getting George in a room safe from the outlaws, so that he could not be shot, and then bringing on the cavalry, was as cleverly conceived as it was brilliantly put into execution.

"So this Kearfoot shot himself," said the General. "What's to be done with the other rascals?"

"Hanging's too good for them," observed Smethurst.

"Exactly," answered Thomas, with a smile. "A little hard work will be greater punishment."

Thus it happened that during the remainder of the war the ex-outlaws were made to serve in the army as ordinary day laborers, so that between digging in trenches, driving mules, acting as stablemen or otherwise playing the part of drudges, they got no end of work. At the close of the war they disappeared, but it is understood that Charlie, at least, became a respectable citizen and was the mayor of a town in Montana when he died.

As we have seen the last of "poor ole Chloe" and Chesapeake Maryland, so far as this story is concerned, let us add that a number of the army officers, headed by General Thomas, made up a fund from which a small annuity was purchased that enabled her to pass the remainder of her days in what was, for her at least, comparative luxury. She established herself in a cozy little cabin near her family, and took Chesapeake Maryland to live with her. Chesapeake was soon known far and wide as "the man who helped save George Knight," and many were the dimes and quarters which he secured, after the war, by telling the story of that famous day in the outlaws' house. Nor did the recital lose anything

in its thrilling details as time went on and his memory became treacherous. Indeed, towards the last Chesapeake figured as the only hero of the rescue.

CHAPTER X

ONE MORE ADVENTURE

HARDLY had a week elapsed since his rescue from Kearfoot and his men ere George met with another and somewhat different adventure which came near ending his military career. He had been presented with a horse by General Thomas. It was a pretty four-year-old, a red roan, and, having fallen in love with it at once, like any healthy young fellow who liked animals, he spent all his spare time trotting around camp in an endeavor to exercise it. But trotting around the camp was neither entertaining nor satisfying; so George determined to take a spin out into the open country. This was not a safe thing to do, perhaps, for, now and then, parties of Confederates would swoop down near the Union outposts and engage in a fight with Northern soldiers. But the roan was so frisky, and "seemed so in want of variety of life," as his master remarked,

that he resolved to get away from the monotony of the camp, if only for an hour.

Thus it came about that one sunny afternoon, when he had leave of absence from General Thomas, George Knight rode past the fortifications to the southward, and raced his horse across open fields, over fences, and little streams, until he came to a certain country lane. Here he brought the roan to a walk, as he ambled leisurely up the road. The twitter of a bird here and there told him that spring in the South would soon be upon them, and the atmosphere had a lazy, languorous effect upon the boy. The horse, which was in a great perspiration, not unnaturally, seemed content to take no more violent exertion.

"You're a nice animal," said George, patting the roan's head, as they went on, "and justify your name of Abraham Lincoln."

Just then "Abraham Lincoln" shied. The boy looked to see the cause of the trouble, and discovered a girl of about fifteen sitting on the outside of a hedge along the lane. As George approached she jumped hastily to her feet. He took off his cap as he passed her, while she, ob-

serving his blue uniform closely, seemed to hesitate for a moment as to whether or not she should recognize the salute. The hesitation was only momentary, however.

"Wait a minute," she cried. George reined in his horse, and she was almost immediately alongside his saddle. "What can I do for you?" he asked, in his most gallant tone. The girl was very pretty; she had dark hair and eyes, and her complexion was far rosier than that of the average Tennessee maiden. Yet there was a stern expression about her mouth which rather detracted from her more graceful qualities.

"You belong to the Federal camp?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the rider.

"Do you think I could sell milk in the camp?" She turned away her bright eyes as she put the question; she was not anxious, for some reason, to look "Abraham Lincoln's" master in the face.

But George did not notice this reluctance. There was something magical to him in the very name of milk, an article which was scarce, to say the least, in the Union camp. He was fond of it, and he seldom got as much as he liked. "By

Jove," he said, "the more milk you bring to us the better we'll like it!"

"If you'll come up to my father's farmhouse, just above here," said the girl, "I'll give you all the milk you can drink." She pointed to the right of the road, where, a quarter of a mile back, stood a frame house and some outbuildings, hemmed in by cottonwood trees and a few cedars.

Had she invited him to drink the nectar of the gods the idea could not have been more delightful. "I feel as if I could drink four or five quarts of milk," laughed the lad. "We don't get much milk in camp, you know."

"So I thought," returned the stranger. "That's why I asked you. Will you come?"

"To your house? Indeed I will. But I hope you've plenty of milk there."

"Never fear," laughed the girl. "We don't keep half a dozen cows for nothing."

Within ten minutes George had reached the farmhouse on foot, while the girl, to whom, in the excess of his politeness, he had lent "Abraham Lincoln" to ride, was already on hand to greet him. The place was neither attractive nor

pretentious; it was nothing more or less than a two-story structure with a front door flanked on either side by a window. Dirty yellow shades hung from the latter.

"Come in, stranger?" asked the hostess, in a voice which was meant to be very cordial. She had already hitched "Abraham Lincoln" to a post in front of the house.

George followed her into the parlor, a funereal-looking apartment chiefly distinguished by black horse-hair furniture and a faded carpet.

"Stay here, and sit down a minute," she said, "and I'll bring the milk." The girl retired to another room, while George walked to the mantelpiece and regarded a daguerreotype representing a very tall man in high boots, with a long nose, large mouth, and mutton-chop whiskers. Hardly had he finished the inspection of the picture ere there entered its original. There could be no doubt as to that. Perhaps the whiskers were a trifle grayer than in the daguerreotype, but otherwise the man was unchanged.

The farmer—for he was evidently the master of the house—stared very hard at the lad. Behind him came his daughter.

"Dad," she said, "here's a young officer from the Federal camp." She bore in her hands a large pan filled with milk which she proceeded to turn over to the visitor.

"Thank you," he said, taking the pan, "this seems more like home than Tennessee." He drained the pan, then handed it back to the girl. He was about to add a few words of gratitude when the farmer suddenly threw himself upon the boy, bore him to the ground and sat upon his chest, at the same time that he seized his throat with two horny hands.

"You rascal!" cried the man, as he drew George's pistol from his belt, and threw it across the room, "now I can have my revenge on you miserable Yankees!"

George began to choke. Seeing this, the farmer relinquished hold of his throat. "Do you want to kill me?" gasped the boy. "If so, please choose a more agreeable way than choking me to death." He saw the daughter gazing at him intently. Was it a look of remorse that he detected in her face?

"Oh, don't be worried," sneered the man; "I won't kill you. Some others may—but not I."

"Well, then, would you mind getting off my chest." The farmer only smiled. "What do you want with me, anyway?" continued George.

"I'll tell you exactly what I want with you," hissed the farmer. His voice was as harsh and grating as that of his daughter was soft and melodious. "Since last week I've had a grudge against every Northern soldier in the whole United States."

"Why?"

"Because I had a son—an only son, and the finest fellow that ever lived—who was a captain in Van Dorn's camp, and he was shot as a spy by order of General Rosecrans. He went into Murfreesboro in disguise to seek information, and because he wasn't in uniform some of your fellows had him murdered. So I vowed if ever I caught any of you blue coats I'd have my revenge. And you promised to help me, didn't you, Lavinia?"

The girl, Lavinia, hung her head. She had been furious when she heard of the death of her brother; she had taken a vow to avenge his death, and in pursuance of that vow she had entrapped George Knight into her father's house. Yet she

felt sorry already, at what she had done. The boy looked so young, and he had been so unsuspecting that she was ashamed she had deliberately led him into this situation.

"Oh, let him go, dad," she entreated. "He's only a boy."

"Only a boy?" echoed the farmer, in scorn. "Don't get chicken-hearted, Lavinia. He's a Federal soldier, whether he's a boy or a man. Have you forgotten your brother so soon?" He gave George a wild glance that was by no means reassuring.

Miss Lavinia bowed her head in submission. "All right," she said, "I'll not forget my brother; but get off the boy's chest; you are killing him."

The farmer rose to his feet, hastily picked George's pistol from the floor, and commanded the boy to get up. This George did, not without some difficulty, for his lungs were sore from the weight of his assailant. The latter turned upon the boy a look more akin to angry frenzy than anything else. Indeed, the death of his son had rendered him almost insane. Revenge on a Federal soldier had become a monomania. And the more he gazed at the boy, and realized that he

was one in the same army as the men who had put to death his only son, the greater became his fury.

George, brave as he was, quailed like a guilty man under the scorching eyes of the old farmer, and drew back, almost involuntarily, for a step or two.

"You may well step back!" sneered the farmer. "The men who shot my son were cowards—like you."

"I'm not a coward!" responded George promptly, striding up to his accuser. "As for your son, he was executed under the rules of war, just as any spy caught in the Confederate camp would be."

Here Lavinia burst into tears. The recollection of her brother's death was too much for her. Her father uttered an oath which was evidently meant for George.

"Come," spoke up the boy, "I'm tired of this business! What do you want to do with me?"

"I'm going to keep you here 'til dark; then me and my two niggers will hitch up and drive you over to the nearest Confederate outpost, to be

delivered over to General Van Dorn. I reckon he'll string you up in revenge for my boy!"

George gave a laugh—yes, it was unmistakably a laugh. "The old man has certainly gone crazy," he thought. Indeed, between profound ignorance of the rules of civilized warfare and the fact that his grief had unbalanced his mind, the farmer actually believed that if he delivered a prisoner over to Van Dorn, that General would promptly have the aforesaid prisoner executed to avenge the death of the spy.

"Laugh all you want now," cried the farmer, "for you'll be cryin' before twenty-four hour's up!"

The very next moment George did not feel like laughing at all. It came over him, with a horrible suddenness that if this crazed old fellow did send him to Van Dorn's headquarters he might be recognized as the ex-farmer boy who had played spy in company with Rufus Carton. Then, indeed, his fate would be sealed.

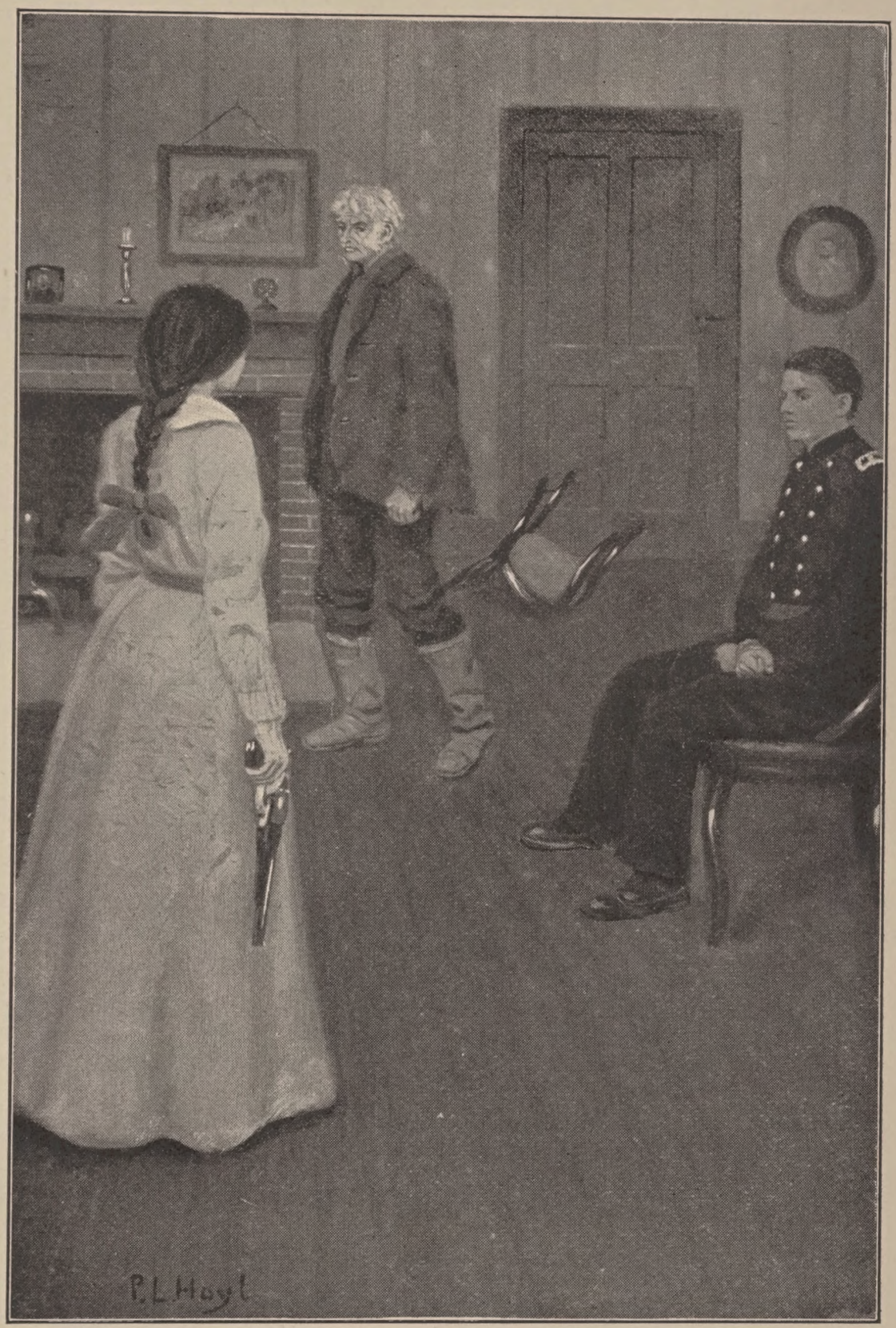
The thought made him desperate and gave him the courage of his desperation. With a swinging movement of his right arm he knocked his pistol out of the hand of the farmer and

started for the front door. He had his hand on the latch before the old Tennessean caught him. The two grappled with each other, much as wrestlers might have done, nor was the contest of long duration. The farmer was larger and stronger than George, naturally enough, and the boy's leg was still weak, so that within three minutes the latter, having given up the fight, sat panting in a chair.

Once more did the man pick up the pistol, but this time he handed it to Lavinia, who had looked on with tear-stained face and hands nervously clasped together during the wrestling.

"Lavinia," he said, as he plucked at his whiskers, "I'm goin' to ride over to Farmer Compton's. I loaned Tom and Jerry to him to work at chopping wood to-day, and I propose to bring the whole three of them back with me, to help take this Federal towards Van Dorn's camp to-night."

He produced from the mantel-shelf a roll of very thick twine or cordage, and seizing the boy's hands, began to wrap it around and around his wrists, so that it actually cut into his flesh. He tied the two ends in a stout knot.



"If That Fellow Stirs While I'm Gone, Shoot Him"

"Now," he said, turning to his daughter, "if that fellow stirs from the chair while I'm gone, shoot him. I know ye're a good shot at rabbits! I'll be back in half an hour. Do you hear what I say?"

"Yes, dad," replied the girl.

"Then see that you remember your brother!"

The farmer left the room by the front way, but returned in less than a minute. "Look here, Lavinia, you promise to do as I tell you, and not let the boy try to escape?" He regarded her with an air of some suspicion.

"I shall remember my brother," answered the girl. The man seemed satisfied; he turned away and disappeared.

There was dead silence in the room for several minutes. Once "Abraham Lincoln," who was becoming impatient outside, gave a neigh which seemed to say to George: "Hurry up, my boy. I'm tired of standing out here." And the boy only wished that he could act on this hint. Never had the prospect of fields and trees, and all that makes the country beautiful, seemed so alluring, and so far away.

The silence was finally broken by the girl.

"I'm sorry I set this trap for you," she said in an apologetic tone. As she spoke she placed George's pistol upon the mantel-shelf.

George flushed as he answered: "I call it a pretty mean trick."

"But, oh," cried Lavinia, "ever since my brother was put to death by you Yankees, dad has been nearly crazy. So was I, too, for I loved Dick better than any one else in the world, better even than dad, and then mother's dead these three years; and when dad talked, sort of wild like, about revenging Dick's death I felt at first as if I could capture single-handed the whole Federal army, and all sorts of wicked thoughts came into my head. It seemed as if Dick had been murdered—and dad thinks so now—but I can see that the Confederates would have done no different by a Federal spy. But when I met you on the road I thought of Dick, and so I led you here." The tears came into her dark eyes. It was very evident that she was now grieved at the success of her ruse.

"You needn't apologize," remarked George, in a sarcastic vein. The twine about his wrists hurt him extremely and his temper was none of

the best at the moment. "You have gotten me here, and there's an end of the whole matter." He had a vague thought of trying to escape, but a look at his tied hands and that pistol on the mantel-shelf dissuaded him from the idea.

Miss Lavinia moved uneasily about the room. "Somehow," she said, as if she were trying to argue out a point in her own mind, "I don't know that Dick would have liked me to do this."

"I'm sure he wouldn't," answered the prisoner, "if he was an honorable Confederate soldier, as I am sure he was."

"Dick was the kindest-hearted fellow that ever lived," exclaimed the girl, with pathetic enthusiasm. "Why, at the battle of Stone's River he spared the life of a Yankee soldier."

"Then you may be sure that your brother was not the man to approve of what you and your father have done."

Lavinia put a hand to her head like one who is torn by conflicting emotions. And so she was. Her earlier passion to be avenged for Dick's death had been succeeded by the thought that she had done a gross wrong to an innocent boy. "But even if dad does have you sent to General

Van Dorn they won't do anything to you, will they?" she continued, trying to appease her conscience. "Dad thinks that you will be put to death, but he isn't responsible now for what he thinks," she added, with a sigh.

George hesitated how to reply. At last he said, "Can I trust you to keep a secret, or must I look upon you as an enemy?"

"You can trust me," cried the girl eagerly.

"Well, then, if I get into Van Dorn's clutches I will be executed, and in short order. For I have already been in his camp as a spy, and am subject to just the same fate there as your brother Dick met with at Murfreesboro. So you may consider your revenge a very appropriate one. We both die as spies!"

"No, no," said Lavinia in excitement. "Don't speak to me again of revenge. Never, never! I have done wrong, and I have been wrong, too, in encouraging dad. I see it all now, and I see that Dick would never have wanted me to play this trick on any one. It's not war; it's only treachery." As she finished speaking there came another impatient neigh from "Abraham Lincoln."

"It's a pity you didn't have this change of heart before you ran across me," muttered the boy.

"It's not too late!" she cried. "Go! I free you!" With that she dashed out of the room, and returning, in the twinkling of an eye, with a sharp carving knife, she proceeded to cut the heavy twine that bound George's wrists. As the twine fell away he gave an exclamation of relief. It had cut hard and deep.

"Now be off with you!" commanded Lavinia, "before I change my mind. You know a woman is privileged to change her mind, and so I may do it before long." She laughed; it seemed as if she were delighted now that she had decided to take the responsibility of releasing her prisoner.

The first impulse of George was to fly to the door, leave the house and mount "Abraham Lincoln" without another word. He had been enticed into captivity by this Tennessean girl; why should he show any feeling when she relented and gave him his liberty?

But this very liberty was due to the conscientiousness and good instincts of the girl. Surely

he owed her some consideration. Had she not, by releasing him, placed herself in a most unpleasant, not to say dangerous, situation?

He rose from his chair. "I thank you ever so much for letting me go," he said, bowing to the girl, "but what will become of you when your father comes back and finds you have sent me away?"

He felt that the old farmer was half-demented, and he feared that his daughter might be in danger of his fury when he returned to find that the bird had flown.

Lavinia started. In her burst of impetuosity this contingency had not occurred to her. She had been so intent on saving the young lieutenant from the fate of a spy that her own fate had not been heeded. Then she gave a little shiver. "If dad comes home and finds I have let you go——!" She said no more, but the stop was full of eloquence.

"I'll tell you what will happen," spoke up George. "Your father's mind has gone daft on the subject of his son. If he returns and learns that you have deliberately freed me he may—he may kill you!"

Lavinia confronted George with calm, serene eyes. She had become self-composed, suddenly enough. "Then let him kill me," she answered. "I had no right to trap you, and if he does me any harm I am only being paid up for what I have done."

George knew that he had only to walk out of the door, to mount "Abraham Lincoln" and he was free. He knew, too, that he owed no debt or duty to this pretty girl, who had been the cause of his capture. Yet there was in his disposition an innate chivalry—call it compassion if you will—which made him loath to leave Miss Lavinia to the uncertain anger of her father. "Dad" was evidently in a mental condition where rage and disappointment might lead him to do anything.

"I can't leave you," he said very simply. "The old man may murder you when he comes home."

"Not if I can convince him that I tried to stop your going away," answered Lavinia.

"But how can you do that?"

She walked to the mantel, took the revolver from the shelf, and asked placidly: "Is this pistol loaded?"

"Of course it is," responded George.

There came a loud report. When the smoke cleared away George saw Lavinia standing in front of the fireplace holding the pistol in her right hand. From her left arm, above the elbow, blood was pouring upon the white sleeve of her muslin dress.

"Gracious!" cried the boy. "What have you been doing?" He was lost in astonishment. He rushed to assist her, but the girl waved him away. "Don't be worried," she explained, "it's only a flesh wound, and I shot myself on purpose. When dad comes home I'll tell him you escaped, and shot me in order to get away. He'll never suspect then,—not when he sees the wound in my arm."

George's sentiments were half admiration and half gratitude. He had admiration for the bravery and brains of Miss Lavinia and gratitude for what she was doing for him.

"Can't I do something for your wound?" he asked. "Let me make a tourniquet?"

"Not a bit of it," she replied, almost laughingly. "That would spoil the whole story for dad. How could I explain how the wound had

been touched by you? No; let it alone until he comes back, and then we'll send for the doctor. You needn't be worried; I knew exactly where to shoot myself with the least danger. I am an old hand at the gun or pistol."

The ex-prisoner came forward and grasped the wounded Lavinia's right hand. "How can I ever thank you," he said feelingly, "for what you have done for me?"

"You have nothing to thank me for," answered Lavinia. She drew away her hand, wherein was the pistol, which she replaced upon the mantel-shelf. "It was I who got you into this scrape, and 'twas my duty to get you out of it."

George looked at the blood crimsoning her sleeve. "I can't leave you in your present condition," he declared.

An expression of pleasure crossed the girl's handsome face, but it was almost immediately succeeded by one of determination. "You must mount your horse at once—at once, I say. If you don't go now you'll meet dad coming back with the negroes! Go, or I'll shoot myself again, and the wound will be more severe the next time." She seized his pistol, put it into his belt, with her

right hand, and fairly dragged him to the door. "Quick!" she cried. But hardly had she thrown it open than she uttered a scream and closed it. "They are riding up the road," she said; "dad, Farmer Compton and Tom and Jerry. You must hide until I send them away on a false chase after you."

She opened the door leading into the kitchen, and pointed to a ring in the floor. "Pull it up," she commanded. George entered the room, and taking hold of the ring, raised a plank about three and a half feet square. Below him was a short staircase leading into the cellar. "Go down there until I let you out," she said, and the boy, having obediently descended into a pitch-dark region, heard the plank close above him.

Lavinia hastened back to the front room, just as the men drew up to the house. She threw herself on a sofa and would have pretended weakness were it not that there was no necessity for such pretense. She felt exhausted from loss of blood.

Having dismounted and hitched their horses outside, Lavinia's father, two burly negroes and

an unhealthy, gray-haired little man, evidently Farmer Compton, burst into the room.

"Why Lavinia!" cried her father, in horror, "what's this?"

"The boy got his hands free," she said faintly (and in the faintness of voice there was no acting), "and got the pistol away and shot me. Then he escaped. It's only a little hurt in the arm."

The farmer was down on his knees tenderly examining Lavinia's wound.

"Why didn't he take his horse?" asked Compton.

For a second she was nonplused. She had forgotten about the presence, outside, of "Abraham Lincoln." But only for a second. "He ran out the back way," she answered; "I think he reckoned 'twas safer to skulk along to camp on foot than to risk being seen on horseback. All of you ride back of the farm, before he has time to get away altogether."

The farmer told Compton and the two negroes to follow the boy; he would stay with Lavinia. The three were soon riding over the country in the rear of the farm.

When the door closed upon them Lavinia said: "Father, you must go for the doctor."

"But I can't leave you alone, dearest." In his love for the living child he had forgotten, for the time being, the wrongs of the dead one.

"You must, dad, or I may bleed to death."

At this awful prospect the man rose, and tearing out of the house like one demented, mounted his horse and galloped off to the nearest physician, half a mile away.

"Heaven forgive me for the lies I have been obliged to tell," murmured Lavinia. "But it was all to save a life." She rose from the sofa, not without difficulty, and crept into the kitchen. Twice she tried to raise the iron ring in the floor, but she staggered back. The third time she was more successful; she drew up the plank, and called to George. He came up the dark stairway. The girl's face, as he saw, was now deathly pale; she put her unhurt arm before her eyes as if she felt dizzy.

"You are faint!" cried George. His voice was full of anxiety; he quite forgot his own danger.

Lavinia tottered, and the boy caught her in

his arms. But she quickly recovered herself, and walked slowly into the front room. The boy followed. "I can't leave you as you are now," he said.

The girl threw herself on the sofa. "Dad has gone for the doctor," she answered, "and when he comes I'll be all right. I'm only weak from loss of blood. If you stay here now you'll be staying for your death—and that would make me a murderess! The coast is clear, if you ride your horse out of the front of the farm. Then you can make a run for your camp. Hurry!"

George saw the force of this reasoning. "Good-bye, and God bless you!" he said after a moment's pause. He forgot that this Tennessean had trapped him; he only remembered, with true chivalry, that she was now saving him. He only saw a wounded girl who had shot herself to help him. He leaned over the sofa, actuated by a sudden impulse, and kissed her; then he hurried out of the house. "Abraham Lincoln" gave a neigh of delight.

"All right, old fellow," called out his master; "there's an extra lot of oats waiting for you when we get in camp." "Abraham Lincoln" whinnied

in joyful response, and was soon galloping with George towards camp. Half an hour later, Thomas Langhorne, Lavinia's father, arrived with the physician. They found the girl unconscious. The physician administered restoratives, brought her back to life, and examined the wound. "It's nothing serious," he said cheerfully, and he proved to be a true prophet.

Then there entered, later on, from the rear of the farm, Compton and the two negroes. They could find no traces, they said, of the young Federal soldier.

"And his horse is gone," observed Langhorne. "It was gone when I got back from the doctor's. He must have been hiding near the house somewhere, and sneaked back and ridden off."

This theory met with general acceptance, nor did Lavinia ever contradict it. And it was noticeable that after the wounding of his daughter the farmer never evinced any further desire to be revenged for the death of his son. He evidently concluded that one experience of this kind was enough, and his mind, once so unbalanced by the tragedy, became more normal. But he insisted until the last that the Yankees had hair on their

teeth and always ate pie for breakfast. In his eyes Dick's execution remained a crime.

* * * * * *

When George galloped into Murfreesboro, and reached the headquarters of George H. Thomas, the General remarked, after the boy had recounted his latest escapade: "My dear George, we shall be obliged to put a collar and chain on you unless you promise to keep near camp."

The boy laughed. "Never fear," he said; "I'll take warning by my latest adventure." And he wondered how Lavinia Langhorne was feeling, and if the doctor had arrived quickly. He wished that he might be able to ride back and inquire for the young lady. But that was, of course, impossible.

Indeed, as the events of war decreed, it was not until many months afterwards that George Knight was able to renew his acquaintance, so curiously commenced, with Lavinia Langhorne. In the meantime he continued to serve with credit on the staff of General Thomas. He was present at the great contest of Chickamauga, where Thomas earned the title of the "Rock of Chickamauga"; and he was with the General

throughout all his actions which ended, so far as great results were concerned, in the famous Nashville campaign. When the war had come to an end one of the first things that George Knight did was to pay a visit to Murfreesboro. He drove over to the Langhorne farm but found strangers in possession of the place. He learned that Thomas Langhorne had died six months before, and that his daughter had gone to live with a maiden aunt at a farm about two miles to the southward.

George turned his horse's head in this new direction. It was not long before he was entering the place. At the gateway stood a very pretty young woman. It was none other than Mistress Lavinia Langhorne. She was perhaps an inch taller than when we last saw her, and undeniably handsomer.

George leaned out of the wagon. "Do you know me, Miss Langhorne?" he asked eagerly.

The girl looked at him. "Why it's the boy I tricked!" she cried. "Only you're a man now." And she blushed so that she looked like a peony.

It may be imagined that this was not the last meeting of the two young persons. Indeed, we are violating no confidences when we tell our readers that Lavinia Langhorne became, in the course of several years, Mrs. George Knight. George often says that of all the lucky things the Civil War brought him the best of all was "a Confederate wife."

What more of our story remains to tell? Nothing perhaps, save that Rufus Carton and Major Smethurst came out of the war with some wounds and much glory. So, too, did the horse, "Abraham Lincoln," who lived to a good old age, and was followed to the grave, when he died, by the mourning Knight family. The career of General Thomas is a matter of history. He died suddenly at San Francisco, in March, 1870, while in command of the Military Division of the Pacific. His old friend, General William T. Sherman, said of him:

"The quality in him, which I hold up for the admiration and example of the young, is his complete and entire devotion to duty. . . . In battle he never wavered . . . and he never sought advancement of rank or honor at

the expense of any one. The very impersonation of honesty, integrity, and honor, he will stand to us as the beau ideal of soldier and gentleman."

THE END

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